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THE SPACE GAMER
No. 15
G. BRADLEY

# THE SPACE GAMER

## JANUARY—FEBRUARY

### FEATURES:


| | | |
|---|---|---|
| WIZARD: a designer's introduction | *Steve Jackson* | 5 |
| OLYMPICA: a designer's introduction | *Lynn Willis* | 9 |
| Byte the Bullet (illustrations by the author) | *Scot Bayless* | 12 |
| Robotics for TRAVELLER | *Tony Watson* | 15 |
| Floating Hulks | *Donald Brown* | 18 |
| OGRE Update | *Steve Jackson* | 19 |
| Orcs and Their Weapons | *Paul C. Wagner* | 20 |
| Ya Wanna Buy A Used World? | *Brian McCue* | 24 |
| Hot Stuff! | *Jerry D. Bell* | 27 |
| IMPERIUM: a review | *Tony Watson* | 28 |
| LORDS OF VALETIA: a review | *Brian Esterson* | 30 |


### COLUMNS


Where We're Going . . . 3
Darnigame Report . . . 4
News & Plugs . . . 22
Books . . . 23
Comics . . . 26
Letters . . . 31



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Murray Lindsay . . . p. 17, 29
Robert Manns . . . p. 18, 31
Mark Hulstruck . . . p. 20
Robert Phillip V . . . p. 21
Winchell Chung . . . p. 25
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# WHERE WE'RE GOING

Often when I sit down to write this column, the only thing that comes to mind is, "damned if I know". Metagaming's potential and options for growth seem unlimited. Yet, decision making is frequently no more intelligent than random die rolls.

In addition to the opportunities that can be seen are the juicy surprises which occasionally pop up. Hindsight shows Microgames to be the gaming coup of 1977. Well, we thought they'd be popular. But, the main reason for doing micros was to get new games published on low budgets, relative to bigger games. The huge success of Microgames is welcome, but unplanned. In fact, because so many micros have to be printed, it now costs more to get out a Microgame than a lower print run boxed game. That's success for exactly the wrong reason. Incidentally, it wipes out the initial low budget reasoning.

It's easier to say what Metagaming would like to do in 1978 than to predict what will occur. Surely, by the end of the year, we will have done something brand new and totally unforeseen that will be profitable.

If Metagaming puts out six to eight new micro sized products, gets computerized order processing installed, and gets out **THE FANTASY TRIP: In The Labyrinth** as a boxed game, 1978 will be successful. Actually, something more than this will be done but that's the bottom line.

The first computer is on order. The first? After struggling with the computer aquisition problem for a year it all falls into place with a two computer system. The first will be a small Datapoint system made in nearby San Antonio. It will handle all mail and wholesale order processing, plus record keeping. It will also handle the accounting system after the order processing has been converted.

The second computer system is still being configured. It will need an initial minimum of 64k bytes of memory, expandable to 128k. It will also have to handle at least a megabyte of on-line diskette storage and a 150 line per minute printer. This system will be upgraded over a 12 to 18 month period to handle four to six terminals, a 40-60 megabyte fixed disk drive, and a second 300-600 line per minute printer.

It is the second system that will handle the **METASTAR 80** play-by-mail game, in addition to some of the complex business analysis problems. Planning for the day-to-day sweat of **METASTAR 80** processing is well advanced. Everything is being designed to reduce handling, and keep effort to a minimum. There's no reason to get people into the game, then have is swamp our staff to the exclusion of all else. Player turns will flow through with minimum confusion and waste.

The **METASTAR 80** manual will be broken into two parts. The rules portion will contain only the instructions necessary to fill out the turn sheet and play the game. This section's length should run less than an average Microgame. The second section will be much longer. It will present information about the game's detailed mechanics, internal data, and processing. You'll be able to play the game after mastering the short rules section. The other section will answer your questions about what happens to your turn sheet information during game processing. You should find it easy to master the rules and separate reference material organized to answer questions as needed.

The three phases of **METASTAR 80**'s introduction will be:

1. Patron Subscribers offered the game for play testing at no charge,
2. *TSG* subscribers offered the game on competitive, paid basis, and,
3. **METASTAR 80** offered to the public in an advertising campaign.

This phasing should provide the means to debug the game and control entry to it. The initial computer system will be able to handle some 1,500 to 2,000 player turns per week. It may be that our *TSG* subscriber base will fill almost all of these openings. If that's the case, the offer to the general public will be delayed until the computer system is expanded and/or additional central processing units are purchased. The 'general public' will probably be phased in with advertising in gaming publications first, science fiction publications second, and other publications last.

**METASTAR 80** and the computer games to follow will be well worth waiting for. They are the projects that generate the greatest staff excitment. They are the projects we get asked about most.

A BIG THANKS goes to all readers who sent us the names of hobby shops and science fiction book stores on their feed back forms. A spot check of early returns showed about 70% of all forms with store names. This data will go a long way toward increasing our distribution network.

**GODSFIRE** and **STELLAR CONQUEST** will be temporarily out of print by the time you read this. The tentative plan is to reissue them both as boxed games in time for ORIGINS in July. **STELLAR CONQUEST** will have no rule changes, but improved graphics. **GODSFIRE** will see some revisions under the direction of the original designer, Lynn Willis.

Metagaming boxed games in the $10 - $20 price range are one of this year's major projects. Substantial time has been invested in negotiations with box manufacturers to insure adequate cost controls. **THE FANTASY TRIP: In the Labyrinth** will probably see a price anywhere from $12 to $20, depending on what the final component mix looks like. There will likely be at least one other new game in a box by the fall.

As this issue demonstrates, *THE SPACE GAMER* has shown steady improvement and growth since those early, hand-assembled issues. This issue culminates most of the effort to improve physically. The cost of physically producing *TSG* will under go little future change.

However, there will be major efforts to improve appearance and content quality. Metagaming is shelving any contingency plans to produce other magazines. Early feedback results mirror our own lukewarm enthusiasm for a separate fantasy or computer games publication. Generally, we see *TSG* expanding in page content and becoming a monthly. Wait, don't ask when because it won't be for awhile. We just know a publication that comes out more frequently, and has a larger variety of features, feels right. So, you can look for more, and better features as *TSG* gradually improves. There will even be stories by name SF&F authors at some point.

Now is the time to remind all our old and budding writers that we actively solicit articles from readers. Here is where I should go into the spiel about how to write carefully. But, Redmond Simonsen already has said it in detail in issue #36 of *MOVES*. *TSG* does have a base rate of 1¢ per word for submissions, so you even get a cash pittance for your effort.

**G. E. V.** is going to carry a $3.95 price tag. Initial estimates indicated that this is what would be needed to cover the 24 page rules book and 50% larger map. However, after working with our printers, we've changed the booklet formats so all micro booklets are base planned at $2.95 for 24 pages. The extra cost of **G. E. V.** ends up being for the map, inflation, and mostly for heavy development cost. Most gamers have noticed Microgames are above average in design quality and rules clarity. All that quality isn't free. **G. E. V.** is the first Microgame that fully reflects development costs.

There will come a time when all micros have to go to $3.95 due to inflation. That time is being postponed by the rapid increase in Microgame sales volume which has allowed economies of scale in larger print runs. But, even with a two year supply as the print run goal, the time is coming when larger print runs will control costs by marginally smaller amounts. Unless we can find some new ways of producing Microgames at lower costs, we'll eventually see that $3.95 base price.

. . . . *Howard Thompson*

## DARNIGAME'S ALIVE AND (UN)WELL!

Many readers remember Metagaming's freelance designer Red "John Gault" Darnigame from early issues. Try as we might, we unfortunately remember him, too. Now, due to heavy political pressure from the Darnigame Fan Club of Futile, Utah, we are forced to report on his recent doings.

The last we saw of Red was over a year ago, when he zipped through Austin trying to foist his then latest design, **TRIVIA! TRIVIA!** on us. **TRIVIA** is a huge extravaganza that refought World War II on the man-to-man level. Well, you can imagine our fright! Maybe WWII at the platoon or squad level, but never, never man-to-man.

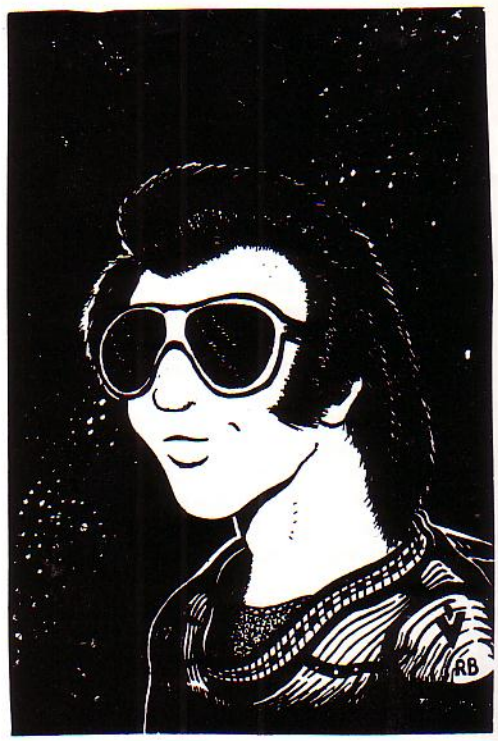
But, we had to hear it all anyway. 58 million counters, a 26 x 26 mile map set, 46 hundred pounds of 86 kinds of polyhedra dice, 58 million individual record sheets (Klaus Schmuck, 18, b. Bremehaven 1921, 6'2", 193, etc, etc.), and he'd have us believe it was all historically accurate to the nth degree. We had to admit all our birth dates and dates of military eligibility were entered accurately. Also, if you didn't want the dice, he'd programmed software for an IBM 370/158 that could be purchased optionally. The standard Rolling Two Box Car Pack would retail at $3,156,825.95, plus tax.

When we pointed out to Red that you's need something the size of Rhode Island to set up and play, all he said was, "I can get it for you, wholesale." He even had a Play-By-Mail kit. "Ferd Nurdson, 3rd, sqd, 2nd Plt., Co. D.,135th Bat., 96th Reg., 86th Inf. Div., 3rd Army U. S., throws anti-personnel grenade at Cpl Johan Henniger behind hedgerow 45 yds N. N. E. of his position on May 17, 1945, 6:32 PM. However, grenade is defective because the October 23, 1944 production scheduling of defective components at Hackensack Grenade Works, etc, etc, etc."

Red said that Game Designer's Workshop wanted to put it out as a 46,832 WWII man-to-man game series. He also swore SPI wanted to strap 13,000 of their plastic top boxes together for the complexity freaks. He also said Gary Gygax was interested in inscribing the rules on the head of a pin and selling them to angels. Steve Jackson claimed he could do it as a $3.95 Pre-OGRE universe microgame.

Well, that's all we heard for more than a year. Then, last week there was a press release from Darnigame that purported to announce the formation of a new game company. It was unbelievably stated that Red had been "born again", and was starting Gross Out Games Inc. with Larry Flynt.

That release was such a shocker, it's under lock and key. You can bet we aren't going to mention games like **SEAL KILL**: Man-to-seal slaughter in offshore Nova Scotia. Those soft, brown baby seal eyes and bloody clubs on the cover were too, too much. Baby seal counters printed with only those soulful brown eyes would break a child molester's heart. The liberal conservationist counters for Jane Fonda and Briget Bardot were sort of, uh nice, though.



**HIGH FASHION**: The Jackie-goes-shopping game, was even worse. Imagine expecting people to compete like jet setters to get the most "in" wardrobe.

And, who knows what market they're going for with titles like: **OSWALD FOREVER, HUSBANDS AFLAME, JEW BOY, ~~POLOK~~ ~~POLAK~~ POLOXS, WETBACK, JAP BAP, NUN'S HABIT, GOD'S GOOD FOR BUSINESS, WOP BOP, SHEPARD, FLASHER, COMMIE KILLING, CHINK CHOPPING, MORMAN MUGGING, MOSLEM MAIMING, FROG FRYING, HUN HURTING, GOD IS MY CON MAN:** The life of a Porno Publisher game, **JESUS SELLS:** Modern Magazine Marketing Game, **BULL CLIPPERS:** Lesbian Terrorism game, **DAIRY FAIRY, BUGGER:** Prison Survival game, **EXTORTION:** The I. R. S. game, **KAT:** Modern Education game, **VICTIMS DON'T VOTE:** Modern Criminal Law game, **MAFIA:** A light-hearted fantasy game with absolutely no basis in reality (honest guys), **HONEST ADOLF'S USED VOLKSWAGENS:** An Alternate History game, and these were only a few of the titles they hope to release. We can only pray Darnigame is putting us on this time.

*(Editor's Note: For those readers who can't understand that this is satire, (there are some), please don't write us about any of these games. This is your official notice that this piece is satire (look it up) and not real. The rest of you should note that even with this notice we'll still get several letters from people who think* **this is real**.*)*

### Scrambled Combat Results Table

Combat Odds

| Die Roll | 1-2 | 1-1 | 2-1 | 3-1 | 4-1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | NE | X | NE | X | X |
| 2 | NE | NE | X | NE | X |
| 3 | NE | X | NE | NE | X |
| 4 | NE | NE | X | X | X |
| 5 | X | NE | X | X | NE |
| 6 | NE | NE | NE | X | X |

***The staff of THE SPACE GAMER would like to apologize to Brian McCue for the inadvertent exclusion of the Scrambled CRT from his article in TSG #14. We include it here, and hope it will better explain his well-written OGRE article.***

# WIZARD: a designer's introduction

*by*
STEVE JACKSON

**WIZARD** is the biggest, the most complex, and the generally *hairiest* game I've designed to date. When the big sections of **THE FANTASY TRIP** come out, of course, they'll dwarf **WIZARD** (since at least one of them will incorporate some of **WIZARD**) and I'll probably be ready for a rest home. I'd rather not think about it now.

Part of the difficulty (and size) stemmed from the fact that this *is* part of an evolving game system. All kinds of things that *don't* happen in **WIZARD** had to be taken into account, keeping later games from becoming illogical. For instance: If you can create an illusion and see through its eyes, what keeps you (when exploring a labyrinth) from simply creating an illusion on the other side of a door and having it report back? Nothing. So . . . we had to say (and it seems logical, anyway), a wizard cannot create an image or illusion except in *his* line of sight. And so on, and on.

The difficulty of abstracting a MicroGame from a large system, when the large system exists only in the form of a steadily growing pile of notes and one ongoing campaign, should not be underestimated. It's kind of like trying to do macrame with worms.

There were three basic steps in **WIZARD**'s design. The first, during the construction of **MELEE**, was when it seemed so simple that we thought **MELEE** might include magic. The second, after that idiotic euphoria wore off, was when we kept coming up with more and more ideas — and more possible interactions. (Well, suppose you cast a fire into the shadow so it can't be seen, and an invisible figure walks into it, what happens?) I didn't think it would ever get straight unless we threw out a lot. The third phase was when it all suddenly shook down, until it was just a matter of playtesting and very careful proofreading to make sure that everything was written down the way it was supposed to be. That was when I was *very* glad that I do all my own typing — it may be time-consuming, but it means I have

more opportunities to find a glitch.

But it's out. Finally.

★ ★ · ★

## GENERAL PHILOSOPHY

The general idea behind **WIZARD**, of course, was to design a fantasy-role-playing magic system superior to **D&D**, **T&T**, et cetera. The first requirement was a method by which the effects of each spell could be clearly and succinctly stated. This is notably lacking in a number of **D&D** spells, but since the gamemaster can make his own interpretation and enforce it on the players, the lack of clarity in the books can be tolerated. However, **WIZARD** is meant to be a non-refereed game. Therefore, to avoid arguments, *each* of the spells has got to be absolutely clear. Otherwise, (as often happens in other fantasy games) the players will spend more time arguing than playing.

Clarity was achieved by making all spells tie in with the established attributes of the game figures. **MELEE** introduced two basic attributes: ST and DX. Figures in **MELEE** also have an MA (movement allowance) and can withstand a given number of hits per turn, depending on their armor. **WIZARD** uses these, plus a third basic attribute (IQ) as factors on which spells act. All spells affect one or more of these attributes, or directly affect a figure's status in terms of the options it can choose. The spell may affect the target's DX (Aid, Clumsiness), the DX of anyone striking at its target (Blur, Invisibility, Flight), the DX of anyone in the room (Dazzle) . . . ad infinitum, almost. ST may be affected by a spell which directly puts hits on its victim. Even IQ can be cut, by a Confusion spell. The more complicated the spell, the more things it is likely to simultaneously do to its subject or his foes in order to achieve its effect.

Spells putting such effects on their target are either Missile Spells (direct wizardly attacks, putting hits on their foes) or Thrown Spells (more subtle, shorter-range spells, some friendly and some unfriendly). There are also Special Spells (weird ones which could not be conveniently classified, such as Teleport, Dazzle, and a few others).

The other classification of spells, and (I feel) the job **WIZARD** does best compared to other systems, is Creation. Using a Creation spell, a wizard can put a new counter on the board — fire, wall, shadow, human (including his own duplicate), animal, giant, gargoyle, dragon . . . anything. Furthermore, the new counter can be one of three types: real (limited as to type of "summoned" being, but totally solid and real), illusory (acting as a real counter until something successfully "disbelieves" it), and image (totally unreal and harmless).

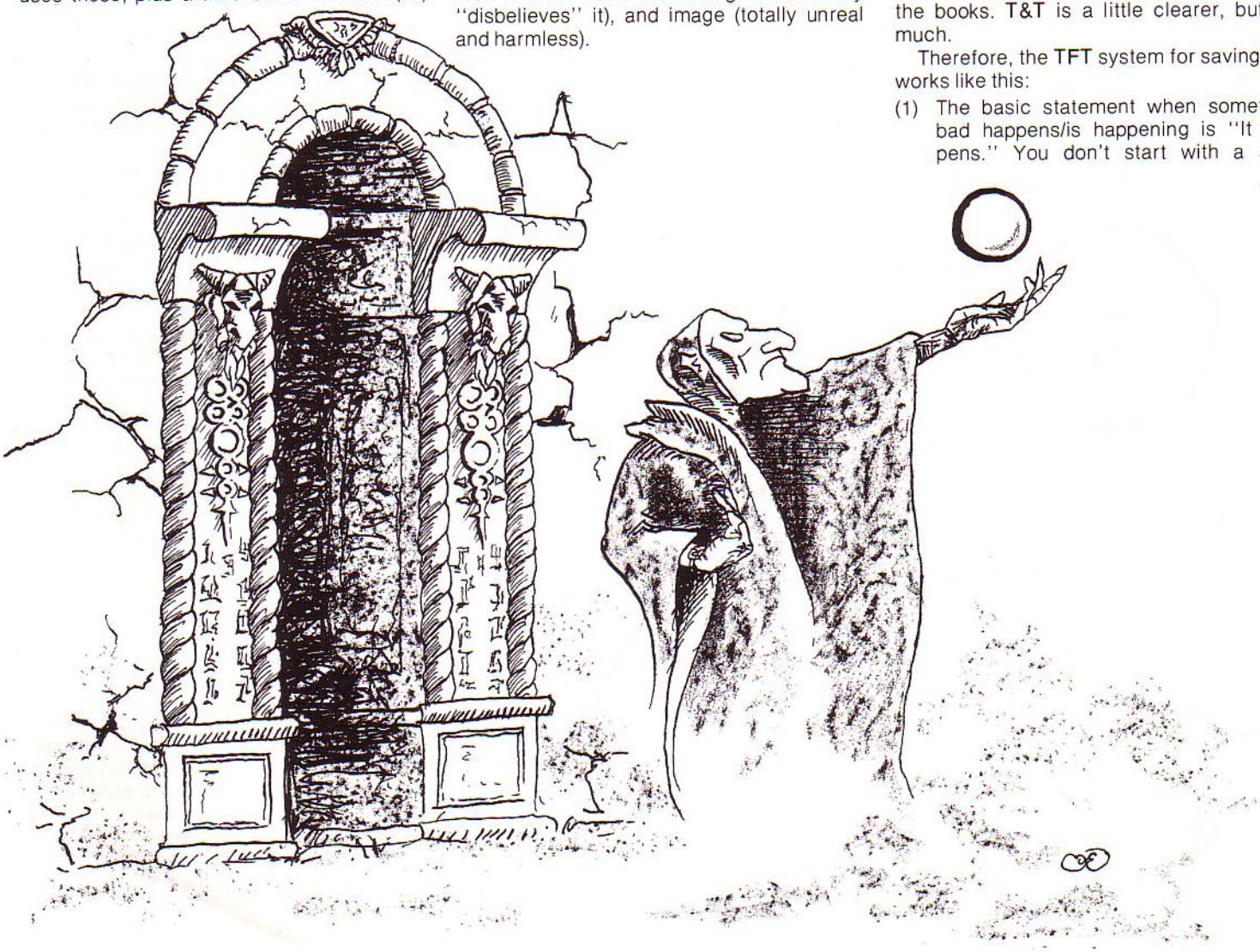
The illusions work especially well, I think. In contrast to **D&D**, **WIZARD** strictly defines how an "illusion" is disbelieved. A character must pick the specific option of disbelieving (which means doing nothing else that turn), and attempts his IQ roll on 3 dice. The Player has to really think a figure isn't real — or at least risk the chance — and the FIGURE has to be intelligent enough to make the roll. Once this happens, the illusion goes away — but until then, it does real damage. No more of this — "We said we disbelieved it!" — "Hah. If you disbelieved it, why did you shoot at it?" — sort of thing.

## SAVING ROLLS

Another thing I'm rather proud of is the *saving roll system*. To be perfectly honest, I didn't want saving rolls in **THE FANTASY TRIP** at all. My thought was, "If it happens, it happens; you don't get another roll to try to get out of it." However, I soon realized there were situations where you *needed* to roll for a bad event — but the roll should be modified to take into account the person that the bad event was about to happen to. Therefore, a saving roll was needed. But I detest the **D&D** system, with complex matrices and tables of saving rolls for all kinds of characters in all kinds of situations, and multiple adds and subtracts scattered through the books. **T&T** is a little clearer, but not much.

Therefore, the **TFT** system for saving rolls works like this:

(1) The basic statement when something bad happens/is happening is "It happens." You don't start with a 50%



chance of the trap springing, the illusion appearing, etc. — you assume it always happens UNLESS

(2) the figure in question makes his appropriate saving roll. Therefore, you have the determination down to one die roll — nice and simple. But you have to take into account the figure making the roll AND the type of danger, so

(3) each saving roll is defined by two things: NUMBER OF DICE and ATTRIBUTE rolled against. For instance, to make an illusion vanish, you need a 3-die saving roll against IQ — that is, if you roll your IQ or LESS on 3 dice (ALWAYS six-sided dice in this system and NEVER polyhedra) you disbelieved the illusion. To avoid falling down when crowded by a giant or dragon, you make a 3-die saving roll against DX. IN THE LABYRINTH will require much harder saving rolls — for instance, a 4-die roll against DX to duck a cloud of sleeping potion or an arrow, a 5-die (!) roll against ST to knock a door open, or an 8-die roll against COMBINED ST and DX to keep from being squashed by the old moving-wall room trick. And so on.

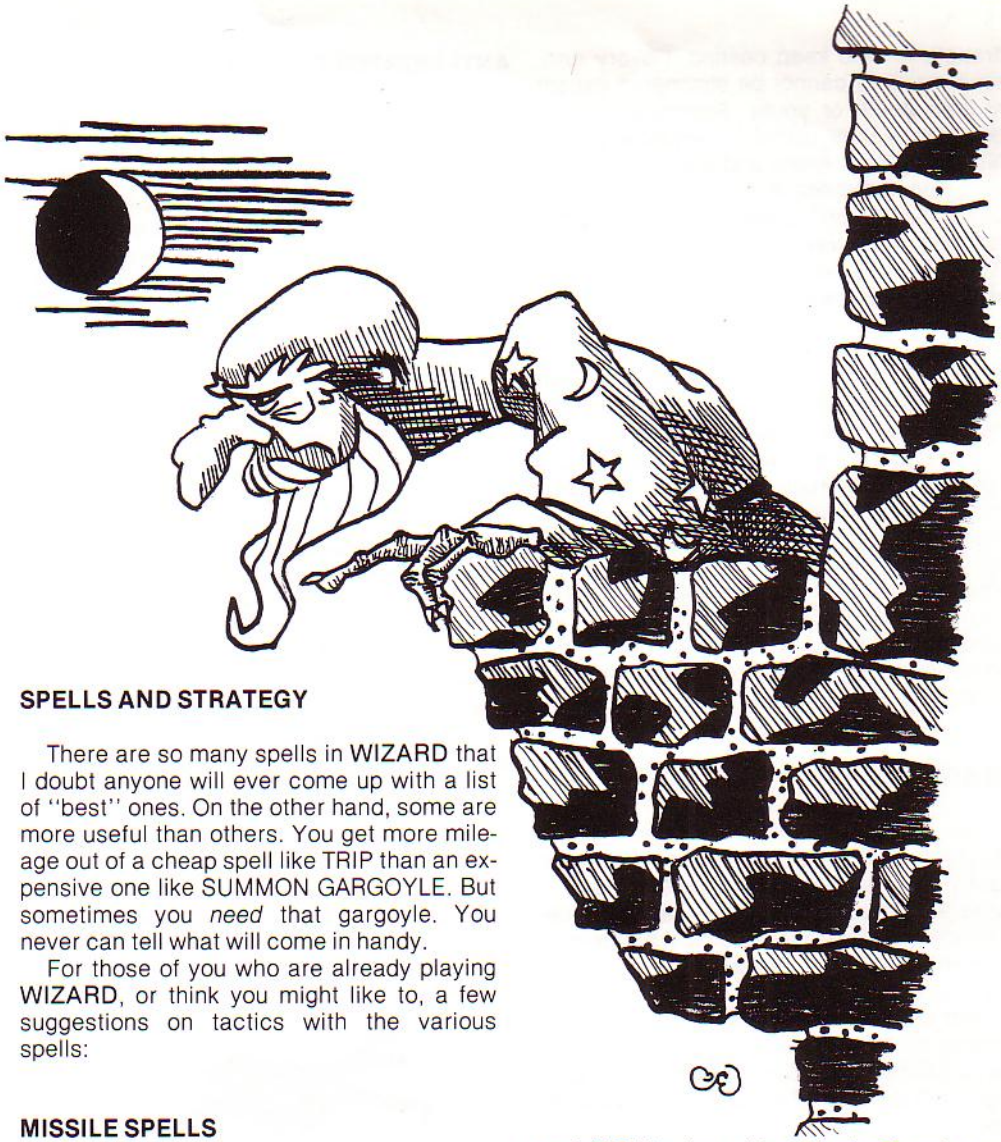
That way, you don't need a table. All you need is your own character sheet. And, of course, luck with the dice.

## CHOOSING ATTRIBUTES

The first thing you have to do, when sitting down to play WIZARD, is create your figure(s). To do so, you have not only the ST and DX from MELEE, but also a third attribute — IQ. The higher IQ you have, the more spells you can learn and the bigger a list you have to choose from. The higher-IQ a spell, the more spectacular it is.

However, IQ is (in my opinion) the *least* important of the attributes. If you are setting up a "beginning" figure (8 in each attribute plus 8 more, or a total of 32 for the 3 attributes), you shouldn't give more than 9 or 10 to IQ unless you are building a team of wizards — in which case it's okay to have one smart, but weak one.

The reason is simple. You HAVE to have dexterity. A wizard with DX of less than 10 or 11 has no business being where people will try to kill him. He'll act slowly, miss a lot of spells, and waste his strength when he misses. And you HAVE to have strength — to power your own spells and to take the hits enemy spells will put on you. A strong, dextrous wizard with a few spells can totally destroy a smart one who is too slow off the mark and too weak to cast all the spells he knows. The trick is to find the right balance. And the right balance for a 32-point (beginning) wizard is nothing like the right balance for a fairly advanced (40-point) one. Experiment . . . create wizards with different point totals and see how they work out. And remember, teams are much more interesting than single combats.



## SPELLS AND STRATEGY

There are so many spells in WIZARD that I doubt anyone will ever come up with a list of "best" ones. On the other hand, some are more useful than others. You get more mileage out of a cheap spell like TRIP than an expensive one like SUMMON GARGOYLE. But sometimes you *need* that gargoyle. You never can tell what will come in handy.

For those of you who are already playing WIZARD, or think you might like to, a few suggestions on tactics with the various spells:

## MISSILE SPELLS

By all means, take at least one missile spell — the strongest one your IQ will allow. Lightning is deadly, and Fireball is pretty good — but even Magic Fist can get you out of a tight spot, if you roll well.

The missile spells are very useful for putting hits on an enemy a long ways away. However, they put a terrific drain on your strength (especially with the Magic Fist), and it is possible to hurt yourself worse than your foe. Therefore, you shouldn't use a missile spell unless you think it'll end the fight (giving you a chance to rest) or unless you *have* to knock out one specific enemy to save your own skin.

Taking a very-high-DX wizard and immediately throwing a missile spell is a cute way to end a battle in one round. However, if you do this too many times, your opponent will either insist on the Courtesy Rule (giving him a chance to put Reverse Missiles on himself and hoist you with your own petard), or take a wizard with (for instance) IQ/8, ST/14, and DX/10. If (for instance) an IQ/8, ST/8, DX/16 wizard throws a 6-die Magic Fist (the best he can do without falling over), he can expect to do an average of 9 hits damage — leaving you with plenty of strength to get him, with your staff (if you have enough ST left to withstand HIS blow) or with a Magic Fist of your own.

## CREATION SPELLS

One of the most unnerving things a wizard can do is start throwing creatures of various kinds at his opponent. Images, illusions, and summoned (real) creatures are all useful, in different ways.

IMAGES are cheap (1 ST). However, they do no harm and disappear when anything (even another image) touches them or vice versa. Use images to distract your opponent and to draw his fire (especially when you're getting weak). An image has to act aggressively (or it won't be convincing), but should try to unobtrusively avoid combat — for when it hits or is hit, it disappears.

ILLUSIONS are the best all-purpose creation. They cost only 2 ST and can do real damage until one of your enemy's figures disbelieves. If your foes are stupid (or don't think you would cast an illusion), this will take a long time. However, if your foes are smart (one of the few great benefits of high IQ), your illusions will be disbelieved easily, and your effort will be wasted.

SUMMONED creatures cost a lot of

strength — and keep costing it every turn. However, they cannot be eliminated except by their death or yours. Against a high-IQ foe, they're very useful — especially if he thinks they're illusions and wastes a turn or two trying to disbelieve. Since YOU make the roll for his attempt to disbelieve, he may not catch on right away. (Similarly, you may trick him into trying to disbelieve an image . . . which won't go away until HIT.)

If your foe uses a lot of creations against you, be flexible. Use images of your own (especially wolves, which move quickly) to engage them and hold them away. If the enemy figures are images, a hit will dispel them; if they're real, every turn you keep them busy costs your foe vital strength. Use images or illusions of YOURSELF to confuse him as to which target to attack. Cast fire around you — that will stop real animals and images, and put hits on illusions. Or — sometimes best of all — ignore the creations, and use a missile spell to clobber their creator.

## OBSTACLES

The other creation-type spells are the obstacles — fire, wall and shadow. Walls are purely defensive. Shadow, however, is useful as an offensive weapon — cast on a foe, it blinds him and messes up his DX, though it also protects him from your attacks. Cast in front of yourself, shadow is a nice defense — and can conceal fire, wall, or even an illusionary or summoned creature. Fire is best as an offensive weapon, though it provides a last-ditch defense when cast in a ring around you.

## ANTI-FIGHTER TACTICS

In a one-on-one fight, a fighter can usually kill a wizard if the two have equal point totals . . . and if the fighters have missile weapons, the wizards generally die very quickly (unless they have a high enough IQ to use Reverse Missiles at the right time). However, in a 4-on-4 fight, three fighters and a wizard can generally demolish four fighters.

The wizard's tactic is to stay right behind his fighter friends — as close to the action as he can get without being engaged by a foe. He should have a staff ready, so he can defend if something gets to him. His function is not to attack directly, but to foul up the enemy fighters so his own friends can hit them. The Clumsiness, Drop Weapon and Trip spells are especially useful here; Stop, Slow Movement, and Break Weapon can also come in handy. He may want to Blur himself, especially if the enemy has bows — better to lose 1 ST on a blur than 3 or 4 to an arrow.

When this tactic works, the foe will spend so much time picking up dropped weapons, standing up after being tripped, and trying to hit with DX lowered by several points that they will be butchered by the fighters. As a last resort, of course, the martial wizard can throw missile spells or strike with his staff. However, he's usually better off acting as a nuisance and saboteur, letting his fighters do the actual hitting.

## RUN AWAY! RUN AWAY!

Several spells are more useful on an actual adventure, than in single (or team) combat — they let you get out of a bad situation. All of them can be useful, even in a duel. These include Dazzle (which messes up the DX of everyone in the room but yourself), Speed Movement, Flight, and Teleport (which can put you behind a foe, get you out of the locked room, or bury you in a wall, forever).

## FAMOUS LAST WORDS

In general, don't let yourself get in a rut with play style. If you do, you'll have less fun, and be easier to beat. Remember: Although **WIZARD** looks like a board game, it's really as much role-playing as anything on the market. If you treat it like a role-playing game, and put yourself in the place of your figure instead of just pushing him around on the board, you'll enjoy it more — and you'll be a better player.

PS: As I write this, the publication schedule for **DEATH TEST** has been changed. Originally, **DEATH TEST** was to come out at the same time as the second programmed adventure (which is still being prepared). However, **DEATH TEST** is now scheduled for publication about the same time as **OLYMPICA** — which means it may be on sale even as you read this. **DEATH TEST** *cannot* be played without the **MELEE** rules. If you have **MELEE**, you can send fighters through — and if you have both **MELEE** and **WIZARD**, you can send fighters and/or wizards through. Warning: The Death Test labyrinth *eats* beginning characters. Give your figures a little experience before they go in — *or they'll never come out.*

# OLYMPICA: a designer's introduction

*by*
LYNN WILLIS

Bogeard sealed his helmut. Behind him Cinc-2 adjusted the straps of the laser TBT which Bogeard carried. A sure communication device, but good only to the immediate horizon. *How best to use it?* Bogeard again ruefully regretted the century peace which bequeathed Force-7 with a planetful of weaponry and no proven tactics to use. *And not one of us has a shred of a once-common human experience — organized killing.*

Cinc-1 and Cinc-2 passed into the lunar evening. Klicks away, white with the last sunlight, hung the top half of the "straight wall", the once-puzzling slip fault. Toward it, fireflies soared. Bogeard tongued his faceplate to 20X as the first fireteam took the 200-meter cliff. Team by team, the jump packs glared blue-white as they traced a waterfall *up* the darkened rock. Once into the light of the upper cliff, the reflected sun outshone the jump pack exhausts. Bogeard then saw only tiny silver dots, still climbing in one smooth motion and disappearing over the top.

*In one smooth motion.* The commander of Force-7 swore in his native French, a language of precise vocabulary. He glanced to see if the comrelay lifter was up, in case Cinc-3 had decided to stand behind a rock, as well he might be, considering the ruin of the ascent exercise. Bogeard opened a channel to Cinc-3 and softly spoke in wartalk. Wartalk, the artificial language of this globally raised combat force, was their only common tongue.

"Cinc-3, record. Reprimand: Martian gravity is more than double Luna's, and the cliffs at Olympus Mons can be 5-6 times as high. I want the men prepared, not deceived. This exercise is ludicrous. Revision: when all units have ascended, weight each trooper with 50-60 extra kilos, and put a five-second cutoff on their jump packs to simulate overheat. They will then descend to the light-dark line on the cliff, and there throw individual anchors into the rock with their bolt-throwers. Have them hang there for two minutes, then descend to the ground. Run four complete cycles, up and down, then report to me."

Cinc-1 called up reserve jump packs from Supply, then studied substitute profiles for Cinc-3. Once he glanced up, puzzled. A single silver dot hung without moving above the straight wall. He sent a TBT challenge, then realized the dot was no man. Even by the slow turn of the Moon, all things came at last. Mars had risen, its angry redness bottled by the encompassing silver of the Web of Celebrance screen. Bogeard swallowed. It was getting late.

**OLYMPICA: The U. N. Mars Raid** always concerned a raid to snatch the technical secret of the Screen from the Web of Celebrance, and thereby open a path for the invasion and freeing of the human colonist, Web-held and unlinked alike. The game always used actual Martian terrain, for I have felt for some time that gaming should begin to reap some of those exciting NASA/Ames results. But, the actual scene shifted a few times.

A year ago, titled "In the Labyrinth" (you will see that title soon), the game took place in Noctis Labyrinthus, that great wedge of broken land to the west of Vallis Marineris. But already the game had failed the planet, or vice versa: I intended the U. N. to have overwhelming combat strength and the Web to have overwhelming mobility via an uncanny set of tunnels which appeared and disappeared between narrow, tortuous canyons. A D&D idea, impossible because Martian terrain suitable to it has not to my knowledge been mapped or photographed. The scene might have been moved to the Moon (rills linked to craters might have worked), but no one takes the Moon seriously since we traded the green cheese theory for those pictures of dirty styrofoam.

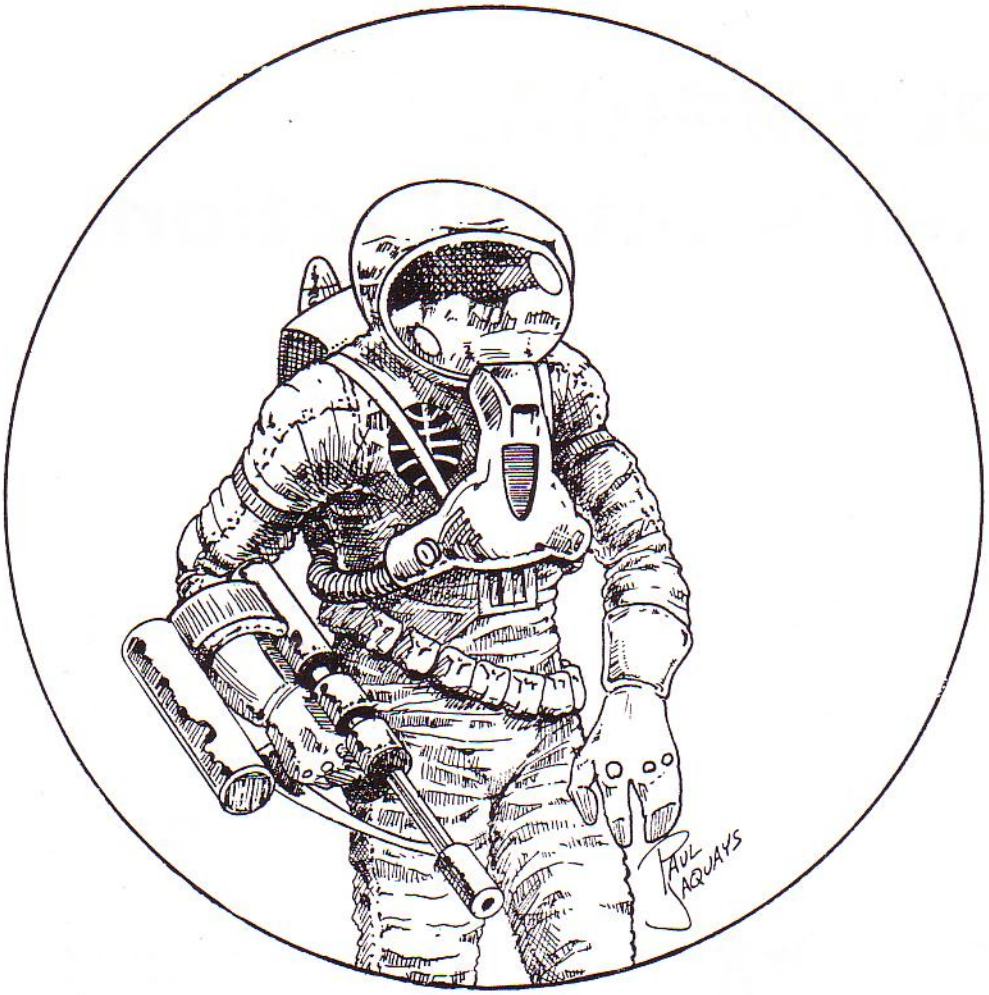
I sent Metagaming a 22 x 17 version with a lot of counters and rules structurally similar to the final version, but much less polished. The reply was iffy. There was this new "microgame" series just underway with something called **OGRE**. And "Labyrinth" was the projected title for an FRP game. Could **ITL** work as a micro?

In late Sprint, **ITL** became "Raid on Elysium", the map shrank to 8 x 14, the counter mix lowered. Action centered around the compact central crater of Elysium Mons, a large volcano. "Hmmm," in effect came the reply, "That's an improvement, but don't you think it's silly to have such a long game about a 10-minute raid?" Well, dumb, maybe. "There are still too many counters — fewer would cut play time." Check. "No way can we do that map on a microgame budget." Micro meant small didn't it? "How about putting the action on Olympus Mons, which some of us have heard of?" That also was a point: the problem with exotic terrain is that it means nothing to the casual observer. Well, I got out the maps and the photos. Sure enough, there was a nice high-resolution, medium-angle shot of the northern half of the caldera of Olympus Mons.

The Web screen was translucent, not opaque. The photo Bogeard studied had been taken the morning before, just after sunrise. In twenty minutes Force-7 would be dying in those shadows.

A hundred million years before, magma had surged again and again, building up an enormous shield which could have covered most of France. When the flows stopped, the mass topped 25km high, far above any other point on the planet. The caldera of this great volcano was 70 km across, elongated along the NE-SW axis, with smaller calderas representing newer and more minor flows at both of the ends.

Just to the west of the northern minor crater, between the rim of the major caldera and an abrupt cliff representing the edge of a magma slump within the crater, Bogeard had drawn a 15km circle on the barren plain: this was the ZOU, or zone of uncertainty, within which Planning had arcanely located one of the Screen generators. In and out of the ZOU lay dozens of gentle, feature-less




demi-spheres, all freshly built — the defenses. If lucky, *Sun-tse's* bombardment would force identifying fire from the stronpoints; if unlucky, Force-7 would make its own fixes in blood.

Ship's channel chimed softly. "Bombardment in forty seconds, Cinc-1."

Bogeard exhaled. He had been told that the information on which the raid was based came from the composit of over a million Earth/Luna interrogations, and he now believed that the briefing by Special Counsel Brevermann had been correct: the Web defense, for whatever reason, had left a way in and out, a door opened for a single ship at a time by a rather elaborate algorhythm sent as a squeal signal at a certain frequency. No doubt that door would be closed or altered after Force-7 left Shield Station Six on Olympus Mons in ruins, but by then it would be too late. Bogeard and *Sun-tse* shivered slightly as the first missile salvo dropped away.

Game scale usually determines in an overall way the mechancis of movement and combat. With **OLYMPICA** the mechanics were completed before the site. Hex width wobbled from 1½-4km, with appropriate adjustments to movement and combat. But SF games have a high fudge quotient. If something is inconvenient, name it or cut off its nose. In return for this freedom, a design should supply what ordinary wargames take for granted: a game situation interlocking with a game world in an interesting fashion. Hopefully the game explores some corner of possibility, as with **STARFORCE**'s three-dimensionality, or **STARSHIP TROOPERS**' command problems, or **OGRE**'s nightmare of the Unstopable Thing. **OLYMPICA** asks some questions which Heinlein did not develop: what might be some effects of thermonuclear weapons on the tactical battlefield, or how would MI handle airless conditions and really rough terrain? Though I make no claim to decimal point accuracy, some general answers appear in the drop rules, in stacking (stacking forbidden because there is not much limit on the amount of force to be thrown into any single hex), DUST (— and fireballs, interfering with all EM broadcast and reception), and lack of instantaneous intelligence (here factored into the limits on ranges rather than a move/no move, fire/no fire scheme. However, much of the game flavor comes from the Web of Compulsion.

The pathfinders were 70 seconds ahead of Bogeard and the exploitation wave, no more than T-minus-four when the ships acted inexplicably. The vast stony cauldron was awash with low smoke and dust from the bombardment, but Bogeard had switched to schematic and followed the pods' verticle transponder signals. No more than 3000 meters above the central domes, each dropship skidded sideways under full thrust, and ejected their pods into grids far away from those targeted. At that instant, Bogeard felt an indescribable emotion race through, but he thought at the time that it was horror at seeing a workable plan botched at the outset. He punched up a rarely-used channel to *Sun-tse*.

"Reaction."

"Compute first wave anticipated and actual T-zeros, and find the difference of locus," Bogeard commanded.

"Calculated. Center point is grid 1213."

"I had three dropships skate at the same time in varying directions. Probability?"

"Infinitesimal. Uh, and AbPsych reports their empath just went batty. Suggests that Webmind is active."

To the curses of his drop-pilots, Bogeard altered the course of the wave and brought them in raggedly, about 15km to the southeast of grid 1213. He announced the grid as the probable location of the generator, but by the time his pod came to rest, he was unsure of the value of the information. The webbies had opened up with their big stuff on First Wave, which had taken 45% casualties in three minutes. Another psychic surge ripped through him, requesting in no uncertain terms that he run from the battle, but it left as quickly. Apparently his pod had not been the target.

Bogeard hesitated, then condemned the rest of the First Wave to a series of assaults coordinated with Laser Tanks 2, 3, 4, and 6 in support. The pathfinders had come down to the north of the ZOU, and were now too few to hold their ground, and the single lifter down was committed to intercepting LT-5 — mysteriously flaming at full power toward a one kilometer vertical surface. Bogeard radioed his regrets to Cinc-2.

Two assaults succeeded. The Web commander had disclosed his strongpoints before his mobile units had created adequate screens, and now the Web fire on Second Wave lessened dramatically. Bogeard and three men assigned to keep webbies off his back bounced out of the pod. They stepped out onto the surface of the sun.

Men on each side were equipped with extremely efficient body armor, a wide variety of ECM and alarms, rack missiles, a laser, and a ballistic weapon which fired a laser-triggered, variable yield thernonuclear bullet; LT's and strongpoints could incinerate a square kilometer in a second in a variety of ways. Surface rock began to drip, as though it were ice. After millions of years, fire returned to the long-dead giant. Perhaps even worse than the inferno was the thunder and heaving of the ground; Bogeard did his best to stay just off the surface while he formed up Second Wave.

Another psychic surge sent LT-4 flying southward, but the rest of the fireteams kept on resolutely. Still condemned to his schematic by the atomic glare, Bogeard raised a friendly hand in salute as they passed overhead and told them to return when they could. As if in revenge, LT-5 took out the web-team in the tunnel in 1717, and Bogeard

resolved to try to man the point. That was a good flank position on the generator. He began to match up the graded ECM domes on the schematic. That would hold down casualties for a while.

The last Web strongpoint fell at six minutes. Now that it could be adequately protected, the Boar came up on one of the two remaining lifters. Bogeard sipatched fireteam Roberts on a close assault through the regular tunnel entrance (how long would the drilling take?) and watched impatiently as the gleaming laser drill set up exactly over a section of tunnel indicated by the seismics people, who had had a bonanza of sounding explosions with which to accurately chart the tunnel complexes.

Cinc-3 reported laconically that fireteam-Roberts had failed the assault, by which Bogeard understood that four more humans lay charred on some rocky floor. The news did not dismay him; humanity had one chance, and he would stuff everyone, himself included, into the gears of the Web. Planning had estimated 70% casualties; the figure no longer seemed incredible.

He greedily watched the laser drill of the Boar chew into the rock. "Drill" was a misnomer. The huge machine carried a drum meters across, and from its base snouted a circular array of many lasers angled precisely. From the center of the circle, a plasma evacuator sucked up the magma as the device melted solid rock like butter. The sides of the resulting tube fused as hard as diamond, and solid basalt would not collapse. But how long would the drilling take? Bogeard ordered another close assault through the regular entrance. The Boar broke through at the same time fireteam Chung reported victory.

Bogeard flew to the red-hot tube. "By drill," he cried, "Assegai, cameras; Toyama, interlocutor; Hernandez, removal; Jonas, relay! Cinc-3, send in a spare and take the surface! We're going in!"

Braking with their jump packs, Bogeard in the lead, they fell down the glowing tube. While falling, another psychic pulse flashed through and suddenly broke off, as Webmind had suddenly vanished or removed all attention. *Perhaps,* Bogeard though, *perhaps the entity feels guilt. Perhaps it needs to lose.*

Boots sloshed through the cooling rock on the floor. Dim lights illuminated the barren tunnel. Not twenty paces ahead was the stairway leading down. The teams pounded down the metal steps, gobs of molten rock flying from them to the walls, dripping down until they cooled like worms.

Ahead was the door marked No Admittance. Lasers ready, Bogeard threw the door back, and he and his teams charged in. Eight unarmored webbies lay as still as death on the floor. Had their life fled when the Webmind did?

"Cameras, go! Interlocutors, go!" Bogeard snapped. Two minutes, fifty seconds.

The room suddenly filled with activity. "Hernandez, field the main assembly at signal." Fireteam Hernandez gathered round a metal-cased device with a bulbous head, perhaps two meters high. They aimed lasers at connecting brackets and cables.

"Inerlocutors cycled," Toyama stated, and detached the coaxial nets from the shunt memories. The memories had been stripped and stored.

"Hernandez, bring it up!" Two minutes.

Fireteam Hernandez cut the mountings, hoisted the device, and headed toward the still-smoking entrance.

"Cameras, up! Interlocutors, up! Relay, set the bomb and ascend!"

Only Hernandez and Bogeard remained, holding the device they'd come so far for and spent so many lives to get. She grinned at him. Then, as one, they pushed the generator up the smoldering tube to the surface and the morning sun. Forty-five seconds.

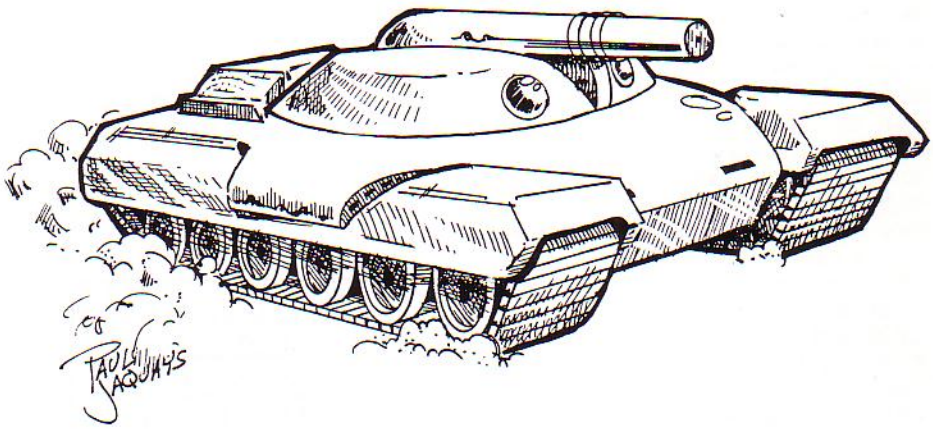
They strapped the generator to lifter B and scrambled on. Fifteen seconds. The two remaining lifters and all aboard had been stripped of everything not necessary for flight or life. Where twenty had ridden, fifty now clung. The lifters, no more than open-work cages, made ignition. Five seconds. One second.

"Let's go," said Bogeard, and the survivors headed for rendevous with the returning *Sun-tse.*

The constraints of the MicroGame format interested me. There is a lot to be said for absolute freedom, but squeezed freedom may be more productive. As you are aware by now, everything in **OLYMPICA** relates to a single story, that of the immaculately brave men and women who dropped into the caldera, knowing they almost certainly would fall or die, or both. Both versions play quickly; the basic version routinely takes less than an hour. Several approaches are available to each side, and players will find that early-game mistakes will come back to haunt them. I am happy with the map, since it means something, being a schematic of the actual caldera. The San Francisco testers are named in the game; there are a lot of Austin people whom I thank as well. If you have **OLYMPICA** questions or comments, my address is 12 Perine Place, San Francisco, Calif., 94115.

Hunched over a table in the *Sun-tse*'s day room, Bogeard completed his preliminary report. He watched his troops at lunch, their conversation constantly scraping against the edges of wartalk, that language developed only for fighting, which they had expanded in preposterous ways to speak of more than death, dying, and efficiency. *Perhaps,* Bogeard thought, stirring his tea, *perhaps we have only won a battle, not the key. Perhaps this quest of humans to become one is something intrinsic in us, and which cannot be denied ultimately. Perhaps the Webmind points the direction in which our childrens children go, whether or not we today say no.*

But then McEwan stood, and swung up his violin. He played a slow march, a lament, a tribute to the dead, the Scots "Lochaber No More," and the room filled with tears at the mourning beauty. When Bogeard realized that common tongues were at every man's hand, his life changed.



# BYTE THE BULLET

*by*
SCOT BAYLESS

With tax time upon us, most people are undoubtedly stinging from the financial flogging the IRS is about to give them. How is one supposed to engage in a little honest tax evasion when he's been coded, categorized and catalogued by half a dozen government agencies, (and God knows how many banks) . . . each with its own data processing system?

That, unfortunately, is the view most people have of the computer. We conjure images of great, enigmatic black-boxes with an incipient hatred for mankind. Mention computers and stories like **1984, Colossus** and **2001** come to mind. It's enough to give you a case of acute Electronophobia.

No, Virginia, computers don't eat dogs or young children. The fact is, computers are usually rather small, unimposing and incredibly stupid. More on the latter in a bit.

Now for the shocker. Yes, computers **are** still somewhat expensive. However, let's say you're single, with no children and a salary of at least $8500 per annum. Guess what? You paid *more* in Federal Income Tax than you'd pay for a good, desktop computer. And the prices are still coming down.

Great, so you can afford your own computer. Once you've got it, what are you going to do with it? Answer: play with the little bugger. Ask a professor of Computer Science what computers are good for and he'll come back with something like, "They are the single most powerful tool Mankind has ever had to further the aim of Technological Growth and . . . " and so on. I suppose he's right, but the computer is **really** the greatest *toy* in history.

Let's not bother with video games. Everyone knows about them and few can stay interested in them for very long. The problem with standard arcade-type digital games is that they test nothing more than your reaction time. Big deal. You can do that playing jacks.

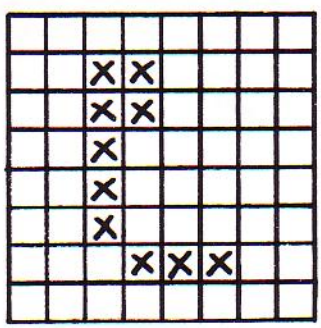
Before we go on, a few words of warning. Should you decide to get into computer gaming, either using your own machine or by renting time on someone else's system, be prepared for a lot of hard work. Remember what I said about stupid computers? Believe it. Imagine having an Idiot-Savant friend. He's great with numbers and has an incredible memory, while he's awake. The problem is he can only understand 30 or so simple instructions, and forgets everything he's learned the moment he falls asleep. Now, imagine trying to teach him how to play **MONSTERS! MONSTERS!**. Programming a complicated game can be one of the most frustrating, and rewarding, experiences in the world.

To give you an idea of what you can be getting yourself into, let's take a *very* simple boardgame from conception to (at long last) the birth of a functional program.

### STEP ONE

Start with something easy, like Martin Gardner's *LIFE GAME*. Those of you who read **SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN** probably know what that is. For those who don't, it's a rather nifty way of simulating the growth of a population in a stylized fashion. The rules are simple.

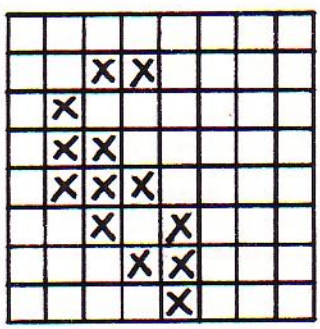
Take a rectangular grid (a piece of graph paper will do) and fill in some of the empty boxes with X's. Your pattern might end up something like this:



Now, starting at the upper-left corner of you grid, scan across each line of boxes, checking to see if any of them are affected by the following conditions:

1. If an empty box has **exactly 3 X's total** in the 8 adjacent boxes, (diagonals are included) put an **O** in the box.
2. If a box with an **X** in it has more than 3 or less than 2 X's adjacent to it, put a circle around the **X**.
3. Note: an **X** with a circle around it still counts toward satisfying 1 & 2. An **O** does not.

Once you've checked each box, go back and replace each **O** with an **X** and completely erase the circled X's. The new X's are births and the ones you erased died. Your pattern should now look like this:



Repeat the process until all the X's die or you get no more births. Or until you get bored.

What you have is a system that constantly tries to adapt to the rules you've imposed on it. Nice, but not much of a game.

### STEP TWO

All games worth playing have one element in common: the adversary. Without that, you're just beating your head against the system. So, let's take the *LIFE GAME* and make it interesting.

Imagine a planet where two species have been battling for supremacy for millenia. Call them Woolybugs and Gumsuckers. Woolies are small and highly prolific. Gummers are great, lumbering creatures with ridiculous appetites and one serious disadvantage. They're trisexual.

The new rules look like this:

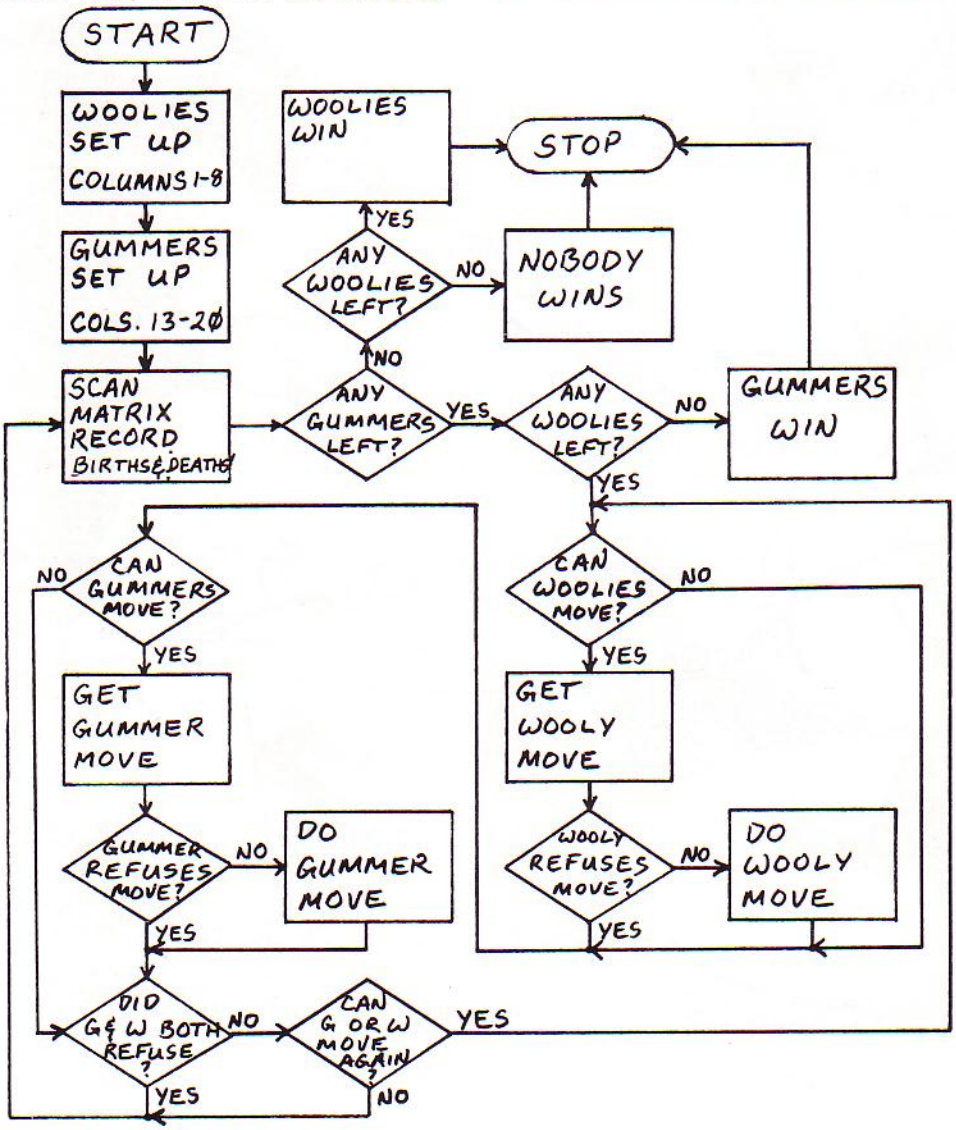
1. An empty box with 2 Woolies adjacent to it will give birth to a Wooly in the next generation.
2. An empty box with 3 Gummers and no Woolies adjacent will give rise to a new Gummer.
3. If an empty box is adjacent to both Woolies **and** Gummers and there are exactly 3 more Gummers than Woolies, it will become a Gummer.
4. Conversely, if there are 2 more Woolies than Gummers, the box becomes a Wooly.
5. A Wooly with more than 4 or less than 2 Woolies next to it dies.
6. A Gummer with more than 3 or less than 2 Gummers adjacent dies.
7. A Gummer surrounded by 3 or more Woolies gets eaten . . . and dies.
8. A Wooly with 2 or more Gummers adjacent to it gets eaten.
9. Each Wooly or Gummer may be moved to an adjacent box at the end of the generation.
10. Both sides begin with a population of 10 and place their critters on a 20*20 grid. Woolies set up anywhere in columns 1 - 8. Gummers start in columns 13 - 20.
11. Players take turns, moving one piece at a time until they've moved all of them, or they choose not to move any more. Then the board is scanned to determine births and deaths. Woolies move first. See what happens when you start messing around with a simple game?

### STEP THREE

Now you're ready to flowchart the program. Sure, you **can** jump right into writing at this point. I know I've done it often enough, but in the long run that flowchart will save you a bunch of time and aspirin. In any case, here's a simplified flowchart for **WOOLYBUGS AND GUMSUCKERS**.

### STEP FOUR

Once the flowchart is done and you've mapped out all the major portions of the program, you're ready to write it. Since nearly all modern microcomputers and interactive terminals utilize BASIC, you can expect to write your program in one of its many versions. The specifics of the language will change from system to system, but without doubt, BASIC is the easiest commercially available language to use. It gets to the point where you actually *think* in BASIC.




Right. So it's a good language. That doesn't mean the computer will do any of your dirty work. You're still going to have to set up a 20*20 matrix for the game board (the computer needs some way to remember what's where). Along with the matrix, you'll need a routine able to scan through it and determine who lives or dies. You need input/output statements, self-protection conditionals, etc . . . In other words, the hard part has just begun.

### STEP FIVE

Finally got here, eh? Finished writing the program and everything. Beautiful! Now run it and see what happens . . . What? The computer is stuck in a loop? It's printing **what** all over the screen? Too bad. You have a new game to play; called "Hunt The Bugs".

Debugging a program is where a programmer shows what he **really** knows. Almost invariably, the first version of a program will have *at least* one improperly addressed conditional, missing line, + instead of a – . . . Something won't work, and ferreting out the bugs takes patience.

### STEP SIX

Well, it took a while, but you made it. The Woolybugs don't up and disappear off the edge of the board. The Gumsuckers are even breeding the way you intended. All you need do is type in your moves and ZAP! The computer does the rest. Now you know the secret of the computer gamer. He's like any other F & SF gamefreak, only lazier.

*—What Else Can You Do With It?—*

Sooner or later, you're bound to get sick of watching Woolybugs and Gummers eat each other. It **is** a very simple game. You feel like stretching out a bit. Well, how about a program that plays the part of an **OGRE**? I know, it's supposed to be "as intelligent as a man", but the **OGRE** has very few choices to make. Its basic tactic is not tactics, just red-eyed bloodlust. That's **easy** to write into a program.

You don't want that? Okay, what do you say to a spacewar program that allows you and your opponents to fly around a star. It takes care of all the gravitational computations and paperwork. You get to play Luke Skywalker. No? You're feeling **ambitious**? Then try computerizing a FRP game. It *can* be done on a relatively small system. Although you'll still need a human referee, the computer will handle all that bloody record-keeping. There is one problem. You'll find it extremely difficult to set up a program of this sort if you're using cassette tapes for file storage. Cassette decks generally aren't capable of running back-

wards to find a particular file name. This means you have to rewind the tape and start from scratch in order to find each separate block of data.

For a FRP game, the best mass storage is either disc (this uses a magnetic recording technique too, but has a much shorter access time) or bubble memory. Bubble memory, however, is still expensive and limited in scope.

*—Where Can You Do It?—*

Obviously, most people can't just dump $500 to $1000 on a toy. Never fear, there are other ways to become a computer gamer. You can get involved in one of the increasingly popular play-by-mail games. Many of these are computer moderated and rather inexpensive. Try Flying Buffalo for starters.

If you're like me, though, the real excitement in computer gaming comes from creating your own programs. Even if you can't afford your own computer, there are ways to get hold of an interactive terminal without demolishing your bank account. First, try the local Junior College. Most of these are State institutions and many don't charge at all for computer time. You may have to enroll in a Computer Science course, but that can only help your cause.

If that doesn't work, take a look at nearby 4-year schools. These usually have more extensive computer systems and, unfortunately, seldom let you use them for free. Nevertheless, the price for system time is reasonable, as a rule.

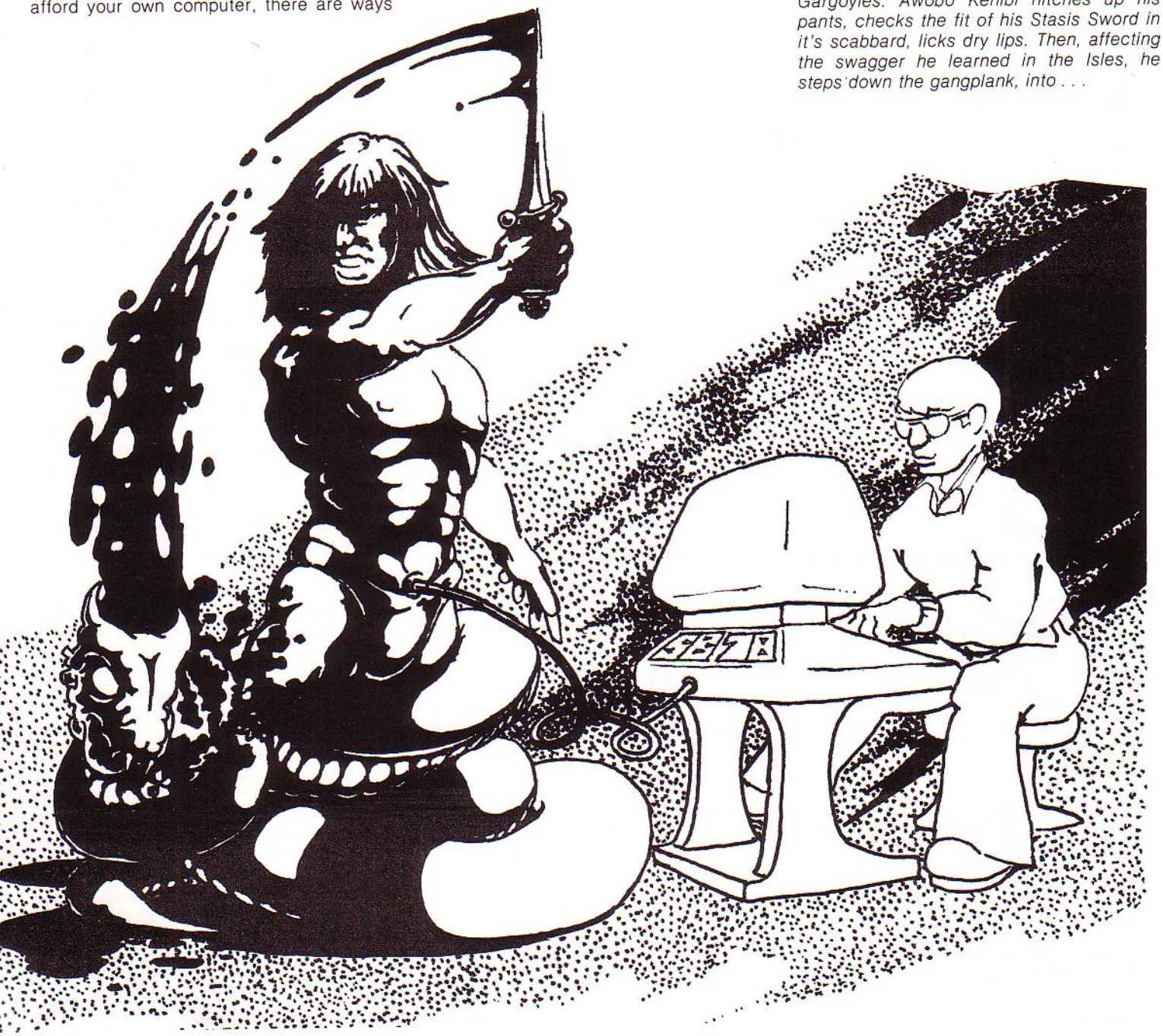
Regardless of what you find at the local schools, track down the nearest computer club. These are popping up in every major city in the country as fast as they can get organized. Small hobby computers are gaining popularity at a horrendous pace and the people who use them seem to have one thing in common. They love to turn newcomers into computer-freaks. Almost without exception, computer clubs will go out of their way to help you become a digital gamer.

*—Where Do We Go From Here?—*

Computer gaming as an art is still growing. Presently, computers are little more than glorified adding machines. This *is* changing. There are already machines capable of understanding and responding to voice commands. Programs have been written that actually expand their own vocabularies by asking what words mean. The Armed Services regularly engage in computer moderated mock warfare on levels ranging from Grand Strategic to Tactcal.

Eventually, the time will come when you'll be able to plug yourself into a computerized system and ZAP!

*. . . The misty streets of The Port of S'uun Frakesh are deserted, cold, feebly lit by great bronze lamps in the shapes of Gargoyles. Awobo Kenibi hitches up his pants, checks the fit of his Stasis Sword in it's scabbard, licks dry lips. Then, affecting the swagger he learned in the Isles, he steps down the gangplank, into . . .*



# ROBOTICS FOR TRAVELLER

*by*
TONY WATSON

Call them what you will, robots, automatons, androids, cyborgs or mechanical men, machines which have taken on the general appearance of men and the capability to perform many tasks that humans can, have always been an elemental part of science fiction. Isn't it fitting that they also be an important part of SF gaming?

One of the few omissions of GDW's role playing game TRAVELLER is in the area of robots. These interesting "creatures" have generated much enthusiasm lately. Two well known members of the mechanical race nearly stole the show from their human compatriots in STAR WARS. Their inclusion in any campaign could be interesting. The following rules are just one way to go about it.

In the technology tables in TRAVELLER's Book 3, "artificial intelligence" is listed as possible under tech 17, just about the highest level provided for. If robots are to be construed as artificial intelligence, then we can see why they are not covered in the rules; tech 17s are not common on the tech index matrix. For our purposes, I'm going to define robots as something less than artificially intelligent. Rather, they will be something like our modern computer: limited in function and capable of only doing what they are instructed (programmed) to do.

We'll begin by introducing some projected robot types.

**Summary of Robot Types**

SERVIBOTS — are the simplest and cheapest of all robots. Their scope however, is very limited. They are capable of performing most menial tasks and labor. They can fulfill the specific role of ship's steward.

MEDIBOTS — are able to fulfill just one function, that of Medic. None are as skillful as a surgeon and thus no DMs are allowed.

Repairbots — possess both basic *mechanical* and *electronic* skills as outlined in Book 1, and thus are capable of most repairs, even of other robots suffering breakdown.

ENGIBOTS — can perform the duties and basic role of ship's engineer.

**CHART I**

| TYPE | STR/DEX/END | | | BRKDWN | COST | TECH |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Servibot | 8 | 6 | 6 | 11 | 100,000 cr | 13 |
| Medibot | 6 | 8 | 6 | 9 | 150,000 cr | 14 |
| Repairbot | 6 | 8 | 6 | 9 | 150,000 cr | 14 |
| Engibot | 5 | 5 | 6 | 9 | 200,000 cr | 14 |
| Navibot | 5 | 5 | 6 | 6 | 250,000 cr | 15 |
| Pilotbot | 5 | 5 | 6 | 6 | 350,000 cr | 15 |
| Warbot Mk I | 10 | 9 | 10 | 9 | 500,000 cr | 14 |
| Warbot Mk II | 12 | 11 | 12 | 6 | 750,000 cr | 15 |
| Warbot Mk III | 10 | 9 | 10 | 6 | 1,000,000 cr | 16 |

PILOTBOTS — are high technology robots that may serve as starship pilots. Mk II Pilotbots may serve as pinnace or ship's boat pilots.

NAVIBOTS — may function as ship's navigator.

WARBOTS MKS I, II, III — are the only type of robot that may violate the "Three Laws of Robotics" (mentioned later). They are primarily machines of war, and may engage in personal combat with blades and weapons. More detailed data is available in Chart II.

Most of the information in Chart I will be clarified in the appropriate areas of the rules. Players should note however, the correlation between tech, price, function, and breakdown. Generally, robots of higher tech may perform more involved and complex functions, but cost more and are more susceptible to breakdown.

**PROGRAMMING**

As the supplementary text to Chart I reveals, robots are fairly restricted in their actions. These rules are not intended to plug robots into the game as full fledged characters; robots should clearly play subordinate, but complimentary roles to their human counterparts.

As mentioned, robots generally do what they are told and that only. This rule should not be taken too literally. A Servibot working as a steward aboard a starship would know enough to ask passengers for their dinner selections at the appropriate time and would certainly possess initiative enough to tidy staterooms on its own. Conversely, the same Servibot would not approach the ship's captain with the intent of lecturing him on better methods of establishing parking orbits around gas giants. (A Navibot however, might be able to provide such information if it were requested, because such is in his realm of programming and function).

The idea is to achieve some balance. Robots are not to be supra-human creatures of amazing intellectual powers; but then again, they're a bit brighter than microwave ovens.

Robots will have a one track mind, being pretty much confined to their particular discipline. Generally, they won't show much initiative beyond their select field; gamemasters will have to make their own decisions as to their abilities in confusing situations.

**PERSONALITIES**

The above restrictions are not meant to make robots dry and, if you will pardon the expression, "mechanical" characters. Each should be a little distinct, just like people.

Robots come with their own personalities

pre-programmed, mainly to make them more human-like and easier to get along with. Characters purchasing a new robot may request specific character traits, but once these are decided on and programmed in, they may only be altered during a major overhaul. The gamemaster is usually required to provide the responses for robots throughout the game (this is a good way for the gamemaster to project himself into the game).

Robots are given names, usually by their owner, during initial programming. These names may be anything the owner wishes (Beep-po, Robbie, Fido or Montgomery — whatever). The robot will answer to this name, as well as its serial number. The serial number may be a random set of numbers and letters or it may be a more structured system. Personally, I do the following: the first letter in the robot type is capitalized and followed by two random digits. This is followed by the first letter (again capitalized) of the world of origin and two more random numbers. Hence a Warbot from the planet Civitas might be called W03C54.

In all cases, the serial number takes precedence over more conventional names.

## THE LAWS OF ROBOTICS

The orders of a robot's owners are always fulfilled in preference to those of a relative stranger, save in very special cases. Only Warbots may violate the following three rules (swiped, incidentally straight from Dr. Asimov.)

1.) A robot may not injure a human being, or through inaction allow a human being to come to harm.

2.) A robot must obey orders given it by human beings except where such orders would conflict with the first law.

3.) A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the first or second law.

If your campaign runs into aliens of a sentinent and intelligent variety, they too will be treated as humans with regard to these rules.

Bear in mind that these laws will make robots fair game for unscrupulous humans.

## ROBOTS AND COMBAT

Generally, robots do not engage in combat, save in certain circumstances. A Servibot tagging along with a planetary mission as a porter might be attacked by an alien creature. Indeed, the first law would require the same Servibot to come to the aid of any humans in the party so attacked.

Robots function in combat just as a human does (refer to Chart I for dexterity, strength, and endurance). All non-Warbots are assumed to be armed with the equivalent of a cudgel. Medibots, due to the special nature of their work and the fact that their instruments are built into their appendages, may be considered armed with a scapel (dagger). Their armor is as jack. Warbot attributes are listed in Chart II.

**CHART II.**

| TYPE | PERSONAL WEAPON | GUN | ARMOR |
|---|---|---|---|
| Warbot Mk I | Bayonet | Carbine | Mesh |
| Warbot Mk II | Bayonet | Laser Carbine | Cloth |
| Warbot Mk III | Bayonet | Laser Rifle | Cloth + Reflec |

Please note that these are merely equivalents and not to be taken literally. A robot may not actually be carrying a laser carbine *per se*, but has a weapon mounted somewhere (head, arm, torso, etc.) that is equivalent to a laser carbine.

The nature of Warbots is a bit different than other types. Primarily, they may violate any of the three laws upon receiving a command from their controller (usually owner). Warbots will obey only their controller, and to switch the robot to control of another person requires the services of someone with computer knowledge.

In addition to combat with personal weapons, Warbots may also serve as gunner aboard ships. The Mark IIs and IIIs may function as crew members for auto-cannon or other crew-served, laser weapons. The Mark IIIs, due to their high level of intelligence, are capable of considerable independent action. In addition to other combat functions, they may operate land vehicles and be used as forward observers. They may even direct other Warbots in simple combat operations.

When engaged in combat, Warbots receive the appropriate DMs for their strength and dexterity. They never grow tired (no weakened swings). Loss of all strength will result in the loss of the ability to use hand-to-hand weapons, while loss of all dexterity means damage enough has been taken to prevent fire. In combat situations, robots always move one on the tactical display and lose this ability only when they have taken damage exceeding their endurance.

Robots are considered destroyed when all abilities are reduced to zero or below.

## ROBOT PURCHASE AND MAINTENANCE

Robots are purchased in a manner similar to space ships, only they are paid off in ten years rather than forty. When purchased, the buyer must advance 20% of the cash price as a down payment. Thereafter, he must make payments equal to 1/60th of the cash price each month for the next one hundred and twenty months. Thus, the purchase of a new Engibot (200,000 cr) would require a down payment of 40,000 cr, and 120 monthly payments of 3333 cr each.

Robots are available at industrial planets or the appropriate tech level or higher. Additionally, purchase facilities may be found at class A spaceports, though the specific type the character wants may not be available (roll 9+ for type to be available, with a +1 for non-warbot types.).

Used robots may also be available (roll 10+ for specific type with a +1 for non-warbots) at 75% of their cost new, paid in cash. Used robots are generally less reliable (roll for breakdown twice a month), and have a chance (10+) of having a serious defect known only to the gamemaster until an appropriate time.

Once a month a breakdown roll is made for all robots. If the total of two dice yield the number in the breakdown column for that type exactly, that robot breaks down and is considered non-functional until someone with mech and electronics abilities (Repairbots qualify) works on it. The repairs may take from 1-6 days. Repairs may also be had on A or B spaceports.

Every year, robots must undergo a two week annual overhaul, usually concurrent with the ship's overhaul, at a cost of 0.1% of initial price. Robots do not of course incur salaries, nor are life support costs applicable to them.

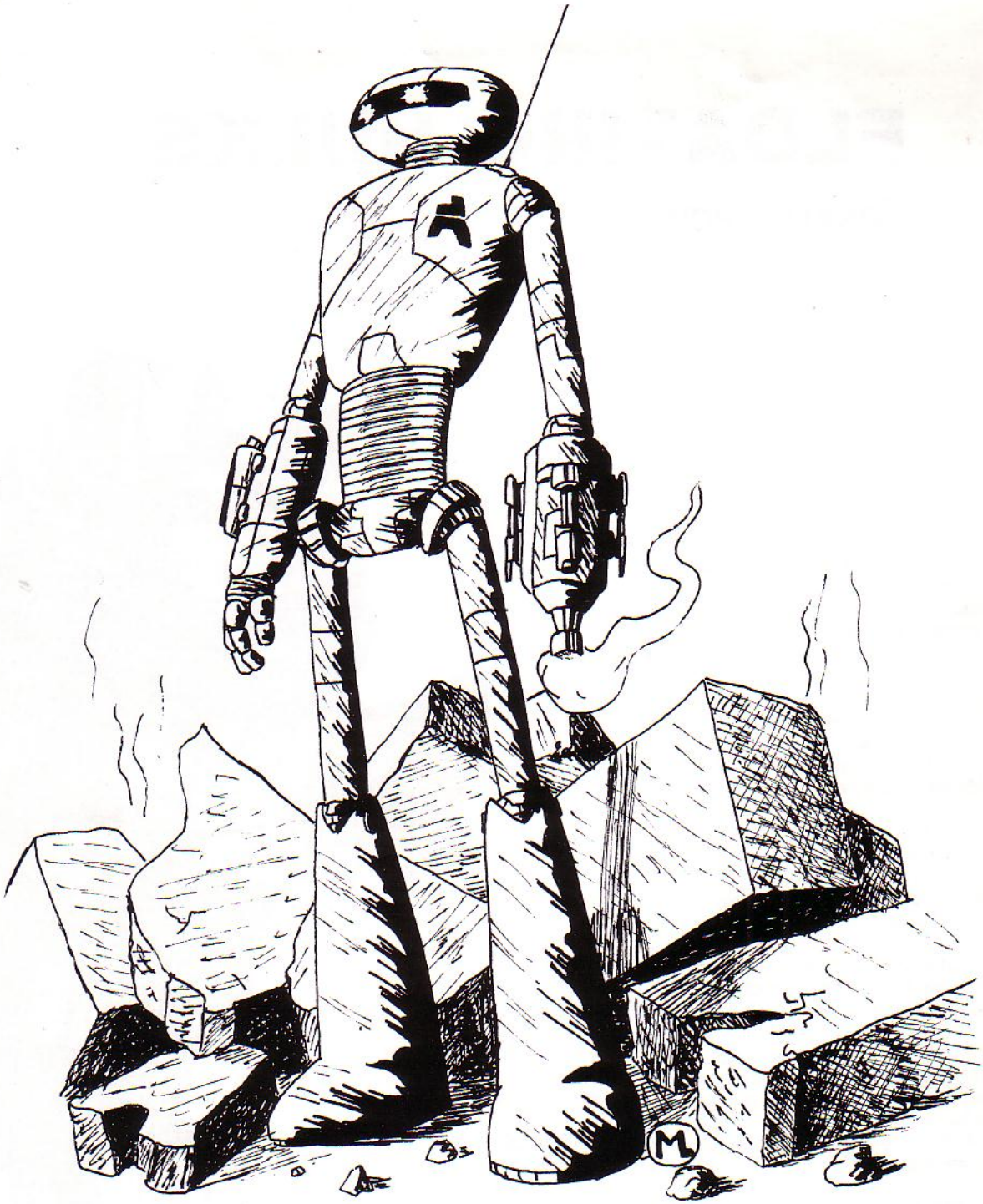
## HUMAN/ROBOTIC RELATIONS

Considerable prejudice exists against robots, and many see them as infringing on human rights. As such, robots should never be elevated to positions higher than humans of the same type (even though the robot is probably more efficient). Thus, of two stewards, one human and the other a robot, the human would order the robot, but not vice versa. Robots are not placed in the position of "chief" anything as long as there are humans serving in the same capacity, even if the robot is more skilled or experienced.

Warbots are especially feared. They are generally outlawed on planets of law level 4 or higher.

Robots are feared and misunderstood by people of lower tech planets. Parties travelling with a robot on a planet of tech level might expect problems of various sorts when they make any encounters with natives.

Statutes decree that the owner of a robot is responsible for any crimes the robot commits, unless it can be proven that the act was committed at another human's behest. In such cases, the robot is impounded and the responsible party is tried just as if he had committed the crime. Robotic testimony is especially useful in court, due to their infallible memory banks, and the fact that they do not lie if directly confronted by humans.



## OPTIONAL EQUIPMENT AND ABILITIES

Robots may be equipped with communication systems which will allow them to talk with their commander at long range. Such a system costs three times the normal price for the appropriate range communicator as listed in Book 3, and includes terminals for both robot and controller.

Also, for a cost of 2500 cr, robots may be fitted with a camera that transmits back to a base station. (A Mk I Warbot equipped with both camera and communicator is often called a Spybot).

Additional modifications can be made; specific costs and other considerations will have to be determined by the gamemasters.

Remember, due to their mechanical nature, robots may operate in all types of environments without vac suits or other protective gadgetry.

If the gamemaster desires, he may allow players to attempt to upgrade the programming of their robots to receive DMs for them in their specific abilities category. The same procedure is followed as is done for attempting to write a ship's program with the addition that an immediate roll is made for breakdown.

## SOME USES OF ROBOTS IN CAMPAIGNS

Used skillfully, robots can add much to a campaign. The prime thing to remember is the nature of the robots themselves. When included, try to take advantage of their unique nature.

Some ideas are listed below:

A planet of a long dead civilizaton where now only robots exist.

A race so unprolific that robots are used for most menial tasks and combat. A ship of such a race might have a crew ratio of one or two aliens to five or ten robots.

Ships of robot berserkers left over from some age old war.

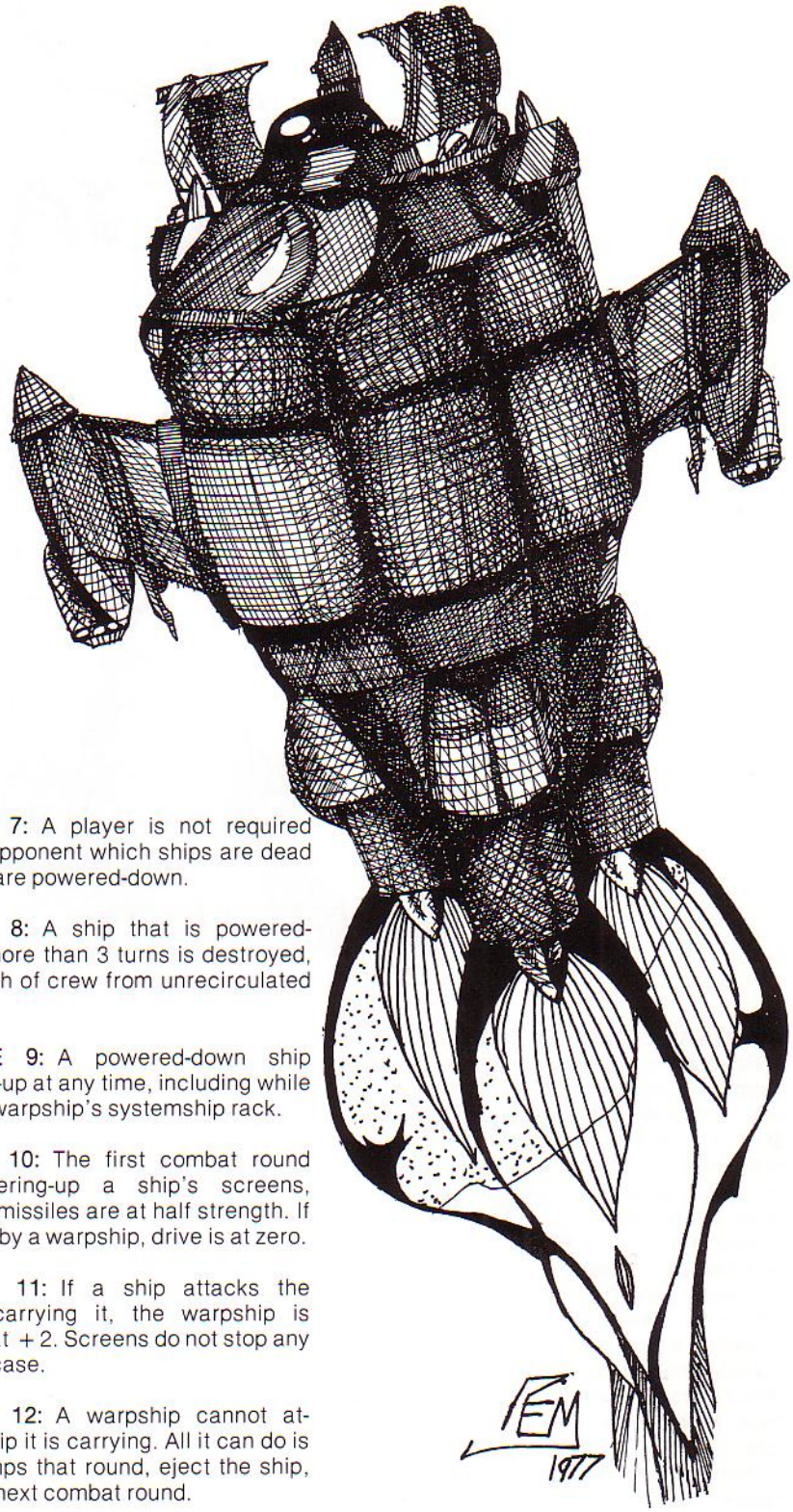
A black market in stolen robots.

An interstellar crime ring that uses robots for the dirty work.

These just scratch the surface. A number of other possibilities spring to mind and each gamemaster will best know how to apply robotics in his own campaign.

# FLOATING HULKS

*by*
DONALD BROWN




There's just one rule in WarpWar that bothers me.

*A ship with only a warp generator left can't control it and the generator explodes.*

It seems to me that anyone brilliant enough to design a warp generator would have enough common sense to have an automatic shut-down device built into the generator. This would leave various hulks floating in space, and that suggests a few new rules and strategies.

HULK RULE 1: Any ship that is destroyed has its counter inverted, not removed, to represent no energy output and warp generator shut-off.

HULK RULE 2: An inverted ship is considered adrift in combat, which means all attacks hit with + 1.

HULK RULE 3: An inverted ship (warpship or systemship) can be picked up by a player's warpship and put on rack so long as there are no enemy ships in the same hex. A player MAY pick up an opponent's inverted ship.

HULK RULE 4: Whenever a player brings an inverted ship to his home base he may scrap it, removing the counter from the board and crediting himself with 1/4 of the ship's original BPs. Any ship built with these BPs are built at the current technological level, not at the level of the scrapped ship.

HULK RULE 5: A player may scrap any of his own active ships that are at his home base as in rule 4.

HULK RULE 6: A player may at any time voluntarily power-down any of his own ships merely by inverting it. While a ship is powered down it cannot move, attack, and is treated as a destroyed ship, even to the point of being scrapable by the opponent.

HULK RULE 7: A player is not required to tell his opponent which ships are dead and which are powered-down.

HULK RULE 8: A ship that is powered-down for more than 3 turns is destroyed, due to death of crew from unrecirculated air.

HULK RULE 9: A powered-down ship may power-up at any time, including while in another warpship's systemship rack.

HULK RULE 10: The first combat round after powering-up a ship's screens, beam, and missiles are at half strength. If not carried by a warpship, drive is at zero.

HULK RULE 11: If a ship attacks the warpship carrying it, the warpship is always hit at + 2. Screens do not stop any hits in this case.

HULK RULE 12: A warpship cannot attack any ship it is carrying. All it can do is take its lumps that round, eject the ship, and attack next combat round.

# OGRE UPDATE

*by*

STEVE JACKSON

The second edition of **OGRE**, published in late 1977, incorporated a number of rule changes and revisions. These were designed to improve rule clarity and scenario balance, and to facilitate design of further games (such as **GEV**) that would be totally compatible with **OGRE**. The intent of the revisions was to change the actual play of the game as little as possible. Only two really substantive changes (the increase of the Heavy Tank's movement from 2 to 3 hexes and the cutting of the GEV's second movement phase from 4 to 3 hexes) were made; other changes either involve the setup or would not be noticed by a casual observer of play.

Nevertheless, none of us have any desire to make the 8,000 copies of the first edition of **OGRE** obsolete. Therefore, as promised, here are the changes made in the second edition.

## COUNTERS

The only change in the counters is on the Heavy Tank. The new Heavy Tank has M3 — 3 movement points. (Physically, the counters are better quality — white-on-black and black-on-white, on heavier, glossy stock.)

## MAP

The map has been reworked; the pattern of rubble and craters is superficially identical, but now occurs on a map having slightly fewer hexes. Since the map is shorter, the Ogre starts 1.5 km (3 hexes) closer to the rear edge of the map. (The map has also been redrawn in a less abstract style.)

## RULES

A number of rule changes have been made — mostly for clarity, but a few are substantive, as stated above. The changes, point by point, are:

1.03 Basic scenario — setup changes. The defending player now gets **ANY 12 ARMOR UNITS**, and 20 attack strength points of infantry. Each howitzer taken counts as **TWO** armor units. All but 20 attack strength points of the defense force must set up on or behind the line between the two craters at the map edges.

1.04 Advanced scenario — set-up changes. As above, except that the defender now gets **ANY** 20 armor units, with HWZs counting double, and 30 points of infantry. All but 40 attack strength points of this force must set up on or behind the line.

2.012 Rubble. Infantry, like Ogres, are now allowed to cross rubble lines at no movement penalty. No other units may cross rubble, ever.

3.015 Infantry counters. The basic infantry counter (3-1) is now designated as a 3-SQUAD counter — not 3 platoons. (Its firepower may be better than that of a modern platoon — but "squad" designation is probably less confusing for a 3-4 man group.) This is a change in nomenclature only.

5.01 Movement. Movement is now described in terms of "movement points" for normal units — an M2 unit can move 2 hexes/turn, and so on. Reason: Conformity with standard game nomenclature. If you can't reform them, join them. **NO** difference in play.

5.031 Ogre ramming. An Ogre is now specifically permitted to ram an armor unit **TWICE** (insuring a kill) by expending one movement point but staying in the same hex. An Ogre loses two thread units (see Section 6.05) for ramming a Heavy Tank, and one tread unit for ramming anything else.

5.04 Infantry overruns. An Ogre cannot automatically reduce infantry by overrunning it, unless it has at least one AP gun left. (The Ogre isn't **ramming** those men; it's shooting them up.) The Ogre **can** expend another movement point, stay in the hex, and reduce the infantry a second time. (It's spending more time there, shooting.)

5.05 GEV double movement. The Gev still has 4 movement points for its first move — but it has only 3 movement points for its SECOND-PHASE move.

5.06 Ogre movement factor. This is a NOMENCLATURE change, not affecting play — but if you don't understand it, you'll get fouled up when you play with someone who has the second-edition rules. The Ogre now has a given number of "tread units" which are destroyed as the game progresses — in other words, what the first edition calls *movement points* are now called *tread units*. This change was made because some people (believe it or not) saw the Ogre had 60 movement points and decided it could move 60 hexes per turn. Others wondered it if could move ONLY 60 hexes during the whole game . . . and so on. Besides — if we call the treads *tread units* and utilize the term *movement points* as it is used in the second edition, we can describe effects of various terrain (forest, etc.) by saying *it takes two movement points to enter* — and so on — and that is exactly how **G. E. V.** is working it.

6.05 Ogre movement factor. This rule is rewritten to conform with the above. An Ogre's movement factor (how many movement points it has) varies according to the number of treads it has left, as always. Same rules — different wording.

6.07 Combining attacks on Ogre tread units is **NOT** permitted. This is to solve the gripe, "What if somebody puts 20 attack strength points into one roll against the treads, and hits?" My gut response is "Well, he blows up 20 tread units — so what?" However, it makes it more interesting if each nit firing at treads must do so separately — part of the appeal of the game, to me, is that you have to make a whole bunch of die rolls. The odds tend to even out and the better tactician wins.

6.101 Restates the rule that when all AP are gone, an Ogre can no longer reduce infantry in strength just by entering its hex.

8.03 Mines. A mine now does the following damage on exploding: X result for armor, D result for infantry, and one die of damage to tread units of an Ogre. That is, if a mine goes off under an Ogre, roll one die; the result is the number of tread units the Ogre loses.

9.03 Mark III defense scenario. The defender gets a Mark III (anywhere) and 12 armor units and 15 strength points of infantry (behind the line). Attacker gets a Mark V.

Mark IIs attacking. Give the defender two more armor units than the standard advanced scenario.

9.05 Ogre defending. The "little help" to be given the watchdog Ogre is now defined as a standard-unit force equivalent in strength to half the attacking force. Best general tactic for this game: Defender keeps infantry back to screen CP, with his Ogre about 6 hexes in front of the CP. Armor deploys in a wider screen. Attacker can try to "attrit" defender and then punch through — or just smash through without formalities. It depends on the force he's chosen.

### CRT changes

On the 1-2 column, a die roll of 4 now gives "no effect" instead of "D". The terminology "disrupted" is changed to "disabled". "Disabled" is a better word for a temporarily-out-of-action tank.

# ORCS AND THEIR WEAPONS

*by*
PAUL C. WAGNER

MELEE is an excellent game. Its rules are clean, concise, accurate, and — most important of all — *short*. For what MELEE offers is actually enjoyable playing time rather than reading and re-reading the rule booklet for clarifications. I think it (along with OGRE) leads all present games.

One small gripe — not really concerning the rules — is the scarcity of foes offered in the initial stage. True, once you get the "feel" of the game you can create, to various specifications, practically any opponent you want. Still, there should be a core of opponents on which everyone agrees. This allows for easier tournament or fantasy journey games of various enemy characters. It also allows for more exciting play with new and different weapons and characters introduced to the playing field. Therefore, after considerable playtesting to insure realism and playability, I propose the following foes and their weapons.

### GREATER ORCS

Greater Orcs are man-like in almost all considerations. ST and DX must add up to 24, with a minimum ST = 10 and DX = 8. Unarmored movement is 10. They easily adapt to weapons not of Orcish origin and are quite often armed in this manner. Greater Orcs are as dangerous as most humans, if not more so.

### LESSER ORCS

As can be inferred from the name, these are Orcs of less physical prowess than the Greater Orcs. ST and DX must add up to 22, with a minimum ST = 8 and minimum DX = 10. Movement is 10. Lesser Orcs usually prefer weapons of Orcish origin to all others. Because most all Orcs are deep mountain dwellers, the grade of ore they use in constructing weapons is quite high. This in turn makes Orc weapons, in the proper hands, very potent.

### THE SCIMITAR

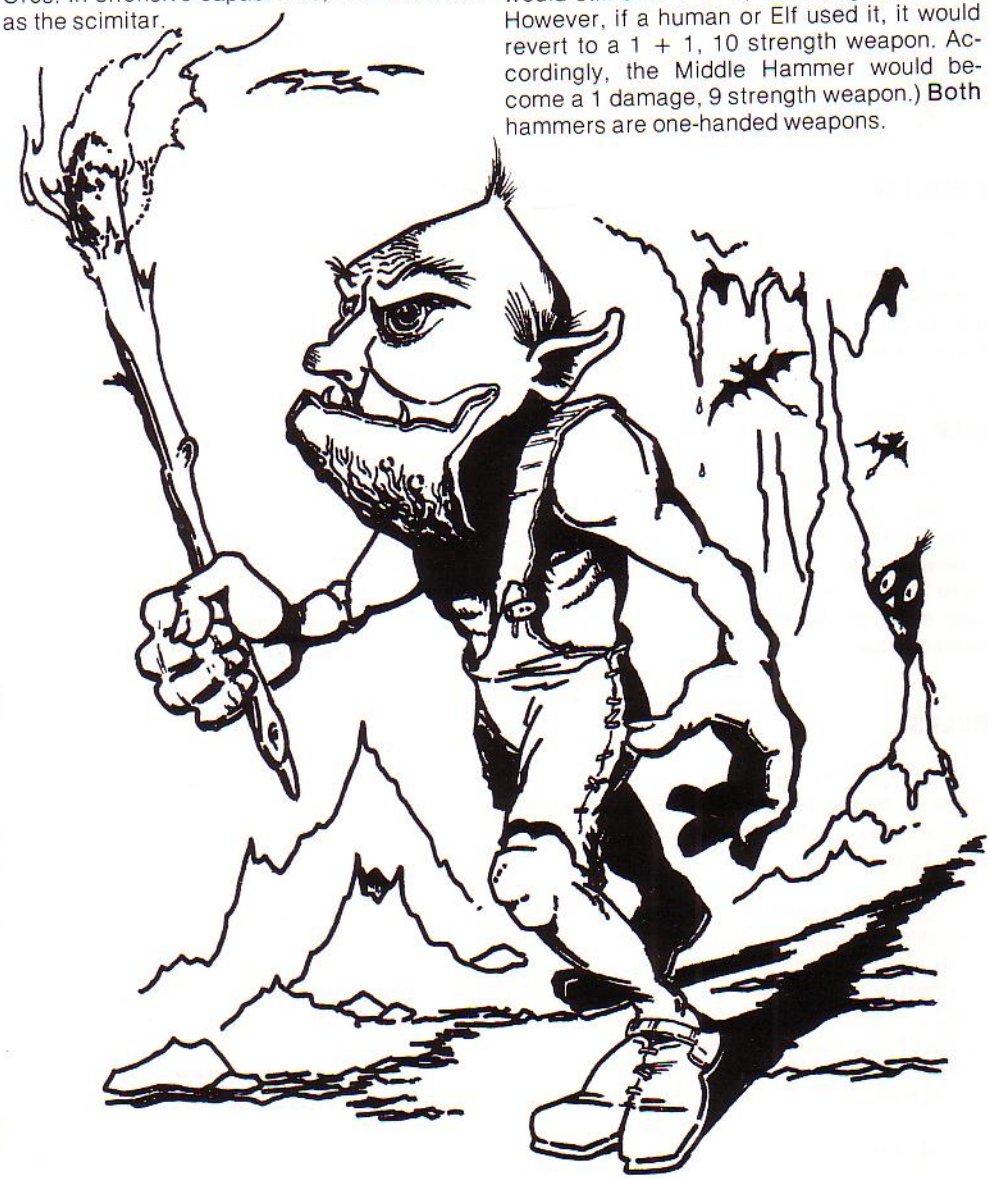
For lack of better descriptive adjectives, the scimitar is a large, curved, single-edged sword. It is a superb slashing weapon, doing a damage of 1 + 1 when it strikes. Requiring a strength of only 9, the scimitar is a favored weapon of most Lesser Orcs.

### THE MIDDLE HAMMER

Orcs, being metal workers, are extraordinarily adept at using hammers. The Middle Hammer hits doing 1 + 1 damage and requires only a strength of 9 to wield, making it another favored weapon of the Lesser Orcs. In offensive capabilities, it is the same as the scimitar.

### THE HEAVY HAMMER

As the name implies, the Heavy Hammer is a bit more destructive than its lighter counterpart and does 1 + 2 when it hits. However, the strength to hold this weapon is 10, and thus it is seen most often in the hands of Greater Orcs. (Note: This hammer is exactly the same as a regular hammer, except that the Orc, like the Dwarf, strikes with an extra + 1 damage. Thus, if a Dwarf were to slay an Orc and pick up this weapon, it would still be a 1 + 2, 10 strength weapon. However, if a human or Elf used it, it would revert to a 1 + 1, 10 strength weapon. Accordingly, the Middle Hammer would become a 1 damage, 9 strength weapon.) Both hammers are one-handed weapons.



### THE ORC SPEAR

A cross betwen the javelin and regular spear, the Orc Spear takes a strength of 9 to hold and does 1 + 1 damage. As a pole weapon, it can be used for charge attacks (option b) to do double damage. The Orc Spear is still a *two*-handed weapon and can be thrown.

### THE GLAVE

The Glave is an original weapon of total Orc design. It is another two-handed pole weapon, but takes a 10 strength to use and does 1 + 2 damage. Being a weapon used only by Orcs, if a Glave falls into the hands of an opponent, it is used as a two-handed 1 + 1 club requiring strength 10.

### THE GREAT GLAVE

The most powerful of Orc weapons, the Great Glave does damage 2 + 2 while requiring only 12 strength to hold. The Great Glave in the hands of a non-Orc opponent is a 1 + 2 two-handed club needing a strength 12 to use. All glaves can be used for charge attacks. Glaves are *not* throwing weapons.

### WARG HIDE (armor)

As Wargs are the allies of Goblins, who are in turn allies of Orcs, it gets embarrassing when questions are asked as to *where* the Orcs got this item of armor. Nevertheless, Warg Hide is standard armor among Orcs, as much so as leather is among humans. It stops 1 point of damage and does not inhibit dexterity *at all*. MA is diminished by one.

### ORC MAIL (armor)

Wrought of high grade ores deep in mountain furnaces, Orc Mail is light-weight and highly flexible. However, it does drop movement by two hexes and penalizes dexterity by +1. Orc Mail, stopping 2 hits, is highly sought after by opponents for personal use, but usually the armor is so badly damaged that it is beyond repair and useless. Even if repaired, it fits only appropriately sized opponents, either hobbits (of which there are few) or dwarves (who refuse to wear it anyway).

### OGRE PLATE ARMOR

Ogres make this armor following the instruction of Orcs. Another tough, flexible, and highly sought armor, Ogre Plate takes 4 hits, and reduces the wearer's dexterity by 4. Movement drops by 3 hexes.

Although these rules may seem to greatly favor the Orc, this is not the case. Three of the six new weapons of orc design are two-handed instruments, making impossible the use of both shield and weapon simultaneously. Lesser Orcs are fair opponents against humans. Dwarves and Elves are definitely better than Hobbits (which is the way it should be). Also, with the exception of the Great Glave, all of these new weapons are fairly light on the amount of damage they do. To do extra damage, normal weapons must be used. The temptation is great to lightly armor the Orc with Warg Hide and small shield for greater offensive rather than defensive capabilities. This makes them *very* vulnerable to projectile fire. The Greater Orcs, on the other hand, are quite a match for any human or Dwarf, and should give more experience points upon their defeat. Be careful with Greater Orcs; they fight well!

# NEWS & PLUGS

**GEN. CO. WEST™ '78:** Boardgames, Tournaments, D&D, Manufacturer's Displays, Lectures, and a 1/76 scale armor/infantry demonstration. September 2, 3, 4, at the Villa Hotel — San Mateo, CA. Write to; GEN. CON. WEST™, P. O. Box 4042, Foster City, CA, 94404.

**GENCON XI;** This con is to be held at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside located outside the city of Kenosha on August 17-20, 1978. This GenCon will be as all others before, but with much better facilities. Write to: TSR P. O. Box 756, Lake Geneva, WI, 53147.

**M M H S:** The Midwest Military Historical Society is sponsoring a game convention June 24-25 at the Elmhurst College campus near Chicago. All types of games will be played with admission set at $1.50 per days. Write to Tony Adams whose address is listed elsewhere in News & Plugs, or call (312) 394-5618.

**PENNCON '78:** Will be held at the campus of Widner College, Chester, PA, on June 23, 24, 25, 1978. Events include tournaments, workshops, demonstrations, auctions, and movies. Obtain information from PENN CON '78, c/o Strategy & Fantasy World, Valley Forge Shopping Center, King of Prussia, PA, 19406.

**GREAT CANADIAN GAMES ADVENTURE:** This convention will be held May 20, 21, 22, 1978, (Queen Victoria's Birthday) at the Holiday Inn, Ottawa, Ontario Canada. Guests include James Dunnigan and Lin Carter. Events include the usual tournaments, seminars, dealers, auctions, films, and 24 hour gaming. For more information write CANGAMES, 201-360 Dundas St., Vanier, Ont., Canada K1L 7W7.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**THE DUNGEONEER** has a new editor. He is Chuck Anshell, 1226 North Rossell Avenue, Oak Park, IL, 60302. All inquiries concerning subscriptions, contributions, retail rates, distribution rates, back issues, etc. should be directed to Chuck. All outstanding payments for magazine orders should be made payable to him also.

**TOURNAMENT STAFFS:** If you live in the Chicago area and are interested in running a Microgame tournament of any kind, please contact Tony Adams, 3605 Bobolink Lane, Rolling Meadows, IL 60008.

**DUNGEONMASTER'S INDEX:** New for the D&D enthusiast is this 38 page, crossreferenced book of over 800 entries. Written by Dave Arneson, the co-author of D&D, this volume indexes all the D&D family of books in one hand place. Cost is $5 from Davis L. Arneson, Adventures Unlimited, 883 Galtier Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55112.

# BOOKS

It is said that every devoted wargamer is a game designer at heart. If this is true, a book has come out which *we* have been waiting for. **WARGAME DESIGN:THE HISTORY, PRODUCTION AND USE OF CONFLICT SIMULATION GAMES**, is SPI's second venture into hardcover book publication. The price is steep: ten dollars.Its 186 pages (that's over 5 ¢ each), contain information for the designer/hobby historian, a game bibliography, a glossary and a list of symbols. The production values are fair (clothbound and sewn with signatures), but it could have been produced for much less. Doubtlessly SPI reasons that customers who need it will pay the price, while they stand little chance of sales to the non-gaming crowd.

The absence of a book like this has been a glaring gap in our hobby. About a year ago, I queried the best wargame supply store in my state about the availability of any text on the design of wargames (yes, I'm a design addict, too). The closest thing my informant could suggest was a cheap offset (mineograph?), stapled-together booklet on how to publish a wargame — price: five dollars! We can be grateful to SPI for seeing the need, and trying to fill it.

The first chapter of **WARGAME DESIGN** is devoted to a study of the history of wargames, the adventures and misadventures of Avalon Hill, the founding of STRATEGY & TACTICS, short biographies of principle, professional game designers/publishers and a brief discussion of wargame clubs and conventions. After that, the book goes to the meatier subjects of game design and development, methods of research and authenticity, sources of historical data and the business of wargaming.

Yet, after reading the volume, I was disappointed. **WARGAME DESIGN** is excellent in theory, but flawed in practical application. While it gives fascinating insights into the methods of a large, atypical wargame producer (SPI), it does not really assist those persons at the grass roots who are interested in publishing their *own* wargame.

What is *not* treated in the book is the essential *gettin' thar furstest with the leastest money*. There is no advice on what sort of printer can do the rather unusual job of printing wargame maps. There is no working estimate of costs to let one know when he is getting a fair deal and when he has found a ripoff artist. There are no hints of what size runs the novice should aim for, or how to market a game as an independent. Then there is the question of finding some one who cuts cardboard counters; all this is information no one is born with, nor does **WARGAME DESIGN** provide it.

As a final assessment, this reviewer shall compare **WARGAME DESIGN** to a very good recipe, with something left out. We welcome it as it stands, but we can use much more.

. . . G. ARTHUR RAHMAN

**THE WEB OF THE CHOSEN** is a Del Ray/Ballantine paperback original for $1.75 by Jack L. Chalker, a relatively new sf author.

Del Rey paperback originals are now falling into a typical pattern. The plots are interesting for those still living in the 50's. The writing is uninspiring. The editing fails the tighter formats that could help the story, and obviously doesn't spur the author. The redeeming feature of **THE WEB OF THE CHOZEN** is that some of the ideas are interesting and, in selected spots, are handled with moderate style. It would be far more interesting if the characters could be seen side ways, and did more than walk through their lines.

The story follows Bar Holliday, no relation to Doc, as he is physically transformed into a quadreped by a mutant virus on a lost colony. But, good old Bar still manages to remain the standard protestant ethic Anglo. Things could have been more interesting if the plot had followed the adaptation and struggles of the colonists. But, the nasty space corporations come along and blow up the planet, saving Chalker from that complex task. Things could have perked up again when the mutant survivors tackle the 104 inhabited worlds as BEM invaders spreading a plague of physical conversion to four footedness. A few pages cover what Heinlein, in his prime, would have rendered as a rousing undercover insurgency.

Chalker needs a more demanding editor, or the guts to work out all the hard parts. His writing can aspire to smooth, readable hack writing. That's not a put down, hard working hack writing is better than most science fiction published. He'd make a nice living and occasionally crank out a gem.

After making **THE WEB OF THE CHOZEN** sound like a crummy novel I have to admit that I got through it all and felt passably entertained. It was better than the previous three or four hack paperbacks I'd read. That's something.

**INVOLUTION OCEAN** is a Jove/Harlan Ellison Discovery Series paperback for $1.50, and the first novel of a new Texas author, Bruce Sterling.

The first thing to do with this book; ask for it over the counter. That way you can get the sales clerk to rip off the *horrible* cover before your eyes are offended. You can also get him to rip out the first few pages which contain a ludicrous plug for the cover's creators and the simpering, silly, Ellison introduction. If you like mouthy put downs of peers, then leave the intro in. Just remember, I gave it to you straight.

Sterling's writing is worth the effort. He has talent, I'm jealous. I liked the book even though I hated the plot and the type of story. I disagree with Ellison's decision to drop the original title *MOBY DUST*, the perfectly legitimate and salable title.

The setting is the planet Nullaqua. The inhabited portion is at the bottom of a seventy mile high, five hundred mile wide crater. The bottom is filled with an ocean of dust complete with whales, sharks and inexplicable monsters. The semi-hero is a self aware Flare (a drug) addict. He hires onto a whaling ship when the drug is outlawed so he can get near the source, whales. The captain and other characters are weirdos, but with depth and personality. A S/M love affair with a surgically altered *bat* lady is handled without sexual exploitation. The climax comes when the captain, more than a tad demented, hollows out a whale to plumb the unknown depths of dust.

Sterling's plot and world hang together in believable fashion if you ignore science. The introduction admits that the novel was beefed from a shorter version. I shows, but not very much.

I liked this better than the Chozen novel by a couple of notches. I am keeping my eye out for other Bruce Sterling stuff with the strong hunch I won't be disappointed. Lisa Tuttle look out, your days as Texas' best sf author may be numbered.

. . . HOWARD THOMPSON

# YA WANNA BUY A USED WORLD?

*by*
BRIAN McCUE

Thorsbit Duncan, my crazy roommate, finally got himself sick of simulation gaming. It took him six months to do it, and nobody is happier than I am that it's all over.

When we moved in to the room in September he was all set to make his first million. He had a whole stack of responses to his ad in the science-fiction magazines:

CONQUER POST-NUCLEAR WORLD!

You command a brigade of survivors who fight with anything from fists to cruise missiles. They're all you've got to control your piece of land in the feudal 21st century. Every two weeks you send in your decisions . . . we run them through our computer and mail you the results. $10 entry fee, plus $3/turn for expenses.

"What's with this 'we'?", I asked him.

"Purely editorial."

"And where's your computer?"

"Actually, it's not mine, it's the college's. I've been hired as a computer operator this term as my scholarship job, and I can run these through at night when the demand is low. It won't cost anybody anything, and I've already written the program."

Everything went according to plan for a couple of months. On the first and fifteenth of the month, Thor would take a stack of letters down to the computer room. They contained all the players' moves for the next turn of the game. Thor fed these into the computer, which then considered the situation and printed out replies telling everyone what happened to them giving Thor a master report. Then Thor earned his three dollar handling fee by mailing the replies.

Returning from Thanksgiving vacation, I found Thor sitting on his bed obviously upset.

"Hey, Duncan, what's the matter?"

"I lost that scholarship job."

"So? You've still got your game to bring in some money."

"Exactly," he replied, looking even glummer. I must have looked puzzled.

"You don't seem to understand," he said (it was one of his favorite expressions), "I've got 110 people out there ready to sue me for mail fraud if I don't come across with their computer game, and now I don't have a computer!"

By the end of the sentence, he was standing tiptoe about three inches away from me. His wispy hair was sticking out in all directions as he glared up at me, but I could see in his eyes that he'd already thought of a way out.

"So how are you going to get out of this?"

"If it's O. K. with you, I thought I'd start umpiring the game myself. It says in my psychology text that the human brain is a computer, so I'd still be doing what I advertised."

"Sure, it's fine with me. See you later, I'm heading down to Bub's Sub."

As I ate my grinder, I began to wonder what made Thor ask my permission to run the game himself. By the time I got back to the room, I'd guessed the reason. When I walked in, I thought I had the wrong room. We now had a bunk bed. Thor was sitting on it, which was the only way he could get at his desk, it being on top of his dresser. All my stuff was snugly packed in one corner. A map of the world covered on wall. Combat Results Tables filled another. A large table marked off with small hexagons occupied the space vacated by the furniture. Dice, rulers, pins, pencils and little cardboard counters cluttered the room.

"If I stay up for a few nights, I think I can get the mailing out on time."

"Fine, just let me get to sleep."

For the next few days and nights, Thor was always in the room, slaving away. He could catch up on his studies later. His map looked like a 110-hole golf course, what with all the numbered pins sticking out of it. Dozens of multicolored counters surged back and forth on the hex table, terrain getting grease-pencilled in as needed. The dice tumbled day and night. On the 29th Thor hung a gatefold over the Combat Results Table: he knew it by heart.

On the morning of the first I woke up and found him sticking stamps on the envelopes. He mailed them, came back to the room, and slept for fifteen hours.

When he awoke, he was in much better shape. I figured he was ready for a question I'd been holding back for a few days.

"Say, Thor, how long do these post-nuclear donnybrooks usually take?"

"Unless somebody conquers the world by force, like Attilla the Hun, it will take about a century for shortages and increased population to force the warring bands to consolidate into nationstates."

"Do any of your players in this game qualify as latter-day Attilas?"

"Hardly. Most of them couldn't conquer their way out of a paper bag."

"Given the time-scale of your game, how long will a century take?"

"Fifty years."

"So. You're going to run this game for the next fifty years? Or do you plan on people dropping out? Because I've got news for you: this room has got to look like an ordinary college room when my parents get here for graduation. They won't want to find their son living with a crazy wargamer."

"My parents won't want to find out their son *is* a crazy wargamer. You're right. The game has got to end in about seven months, or a little over a year of scale time. So don't worry, it'll happen."

"But how? You said that you don't have any world-conquerers."

He stood up.

"I am entering the game."

Thor bought, from himself, an entry in the game. His territory was Tierra del Fuego. From there he worked his way North. His band increased in size and strength. By the time he got to the developed countries in the northern section of the continent, he could use the Overwhelming Strength rules to take over some of their armies intact. Using all their equipment, he rolled up Mexico, and then stopped, reasoning correctly that the warlords of North America would just as soon leave him alone.

Nobody heard from South America for a couple of turns. Then Thor bombed Cape Town and Johannesburg from new bases in Antarctica, using captured cruise missiles. He told the consortium which controlled Australia that they would suffer the same fate if they did not capitulate.They did.

By the time I got back from Christmas vacation (Thor had stayed at school the whole time to work on the game), Thor had gained control of the whole southern hemisphere.

By February, he had taken over India and was working on China. But already he was showing signs of battle fatigue. I noticed that he was wearing gloves as he worked on the game.

"Why the gloves?"

"Can't stand the feel of the dice."

"Don't tell me this game is finally getting to you!"

"It sure is. Last week I asked somebody how many movement factors his new car had. If I don't get this game over soon, I'm going to be a mental case."

In addition to conquering the world, Thor had to continue umpiring the game for everyone else (about which he was scrupulously fair, and not just because of mail fraud laws), and do his school work. For the spring term, he had selected his courses very carefully: Geopolitics, War in Fiction, Probability and Statistics, and an independent study in Mathematical Simulation. He was able to combine these with the game quite often; one time he wrote a story for War in Fiction based entirely on the game. Incidentally, it was at about this time that he started saying "The Game" so importantly that one could hear the capital letters.

By March, Thor had taken over Africa and Europe, as well as all the other inhabited areas apart from the U. S. and the U. S. S. R. Predictably, they joined forces against him. He retaliated by attacking only the U. S., leading the Americans to believe that they had been betrayed by the Russians. Soon he vanquished the U. S.

"So, Commander Duncan," I said, "You stand in the ill-fated bootprints of Napoleon and Hitler. Do you dare to attack Russia?"

He looked at the mapboard.

"Sure I dare to. I have to have this over with by graduation. Win or lose, the Game will be over when the Russians and I have finished fighting. 'The Russians' means just this one guy in Cleveland, so one of us will end the Game by winning it."

"What happens when somebody gets knocked out of the game?"

"He gets a nice little note telling him what happened and thanking him for playing."

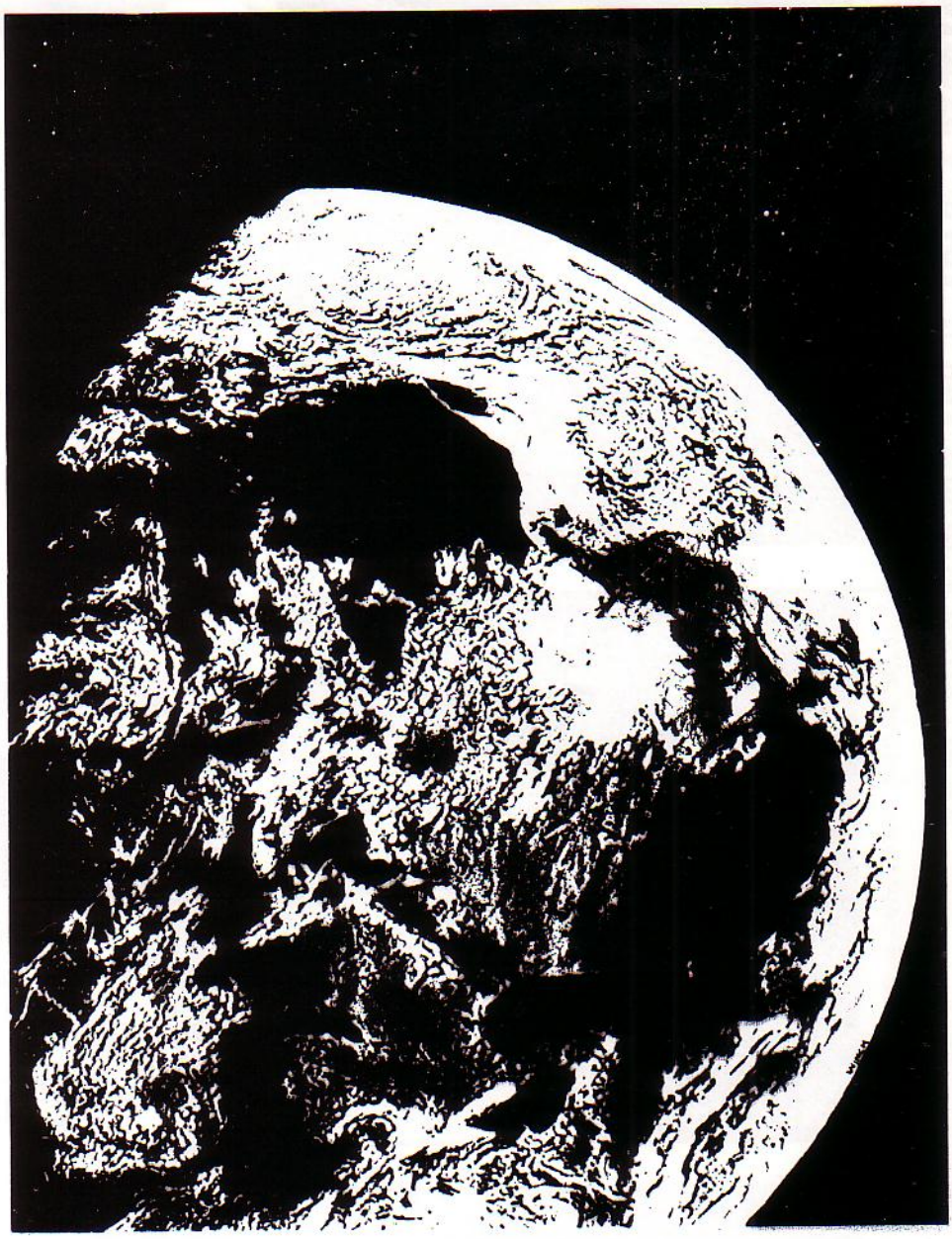
"Who will send you your note if you get knocked out?"

"I will I suppose. I've been acting as two people ever since I started playing and umpiring. Then I'll send this guy in Cleveland a little note saying he's won, and the whole thing will be finished."

On April first, Thor got an entry in the mail. Somebody wanted to join the game. Thor nearly had a heart attack, and then he saw that the entry was from me.

"You, of all people! I supposed all along that you wanted this Game over with so that we could have a normal-looking room and now you try to prolong it!"

"April Fools!"



He sank into a chair. "You mean you don't want to join?"

"I don't."

"Thanks. I suppose I would have had to let you."

After the May 15th turn, Thor was despondent.

"I made the same mistake as Hitler. I made the same mistake as Napoleon. Now I'm bogged down in Russia, and it will be a long time before anything moves one way or the other."

"What's the matter? Is winter coming?"

"No, *summer*. Outside, in the real world," he pointed to the window, "which I am told still exists, summer is coming, and with it graduation. This game isn't going to be over by then. Maybe I had better tell the Russians that I quit and they've won. But that seems a lot like swindling a player, and I'd be the last person to do that, especially after all that I've done to keep this on the level. I don't know. I'm going to bed. You never know what a night's sleep might do for you."

He was still in bed when I left for my classes in the morning, but when I came back he was happily taking down all the maps, grinning and playing the stereo.

"Psst . . . hey buddy, ya wanna buy a used world? I got this one cheap, only used once, last one is stock . . ."

"What happened to the game?"

". . . here, and I'll throw in unit counters for all nations. You can simulate a post-nuclear fracas in only nine months . . ."

"Thor, what's happened?"

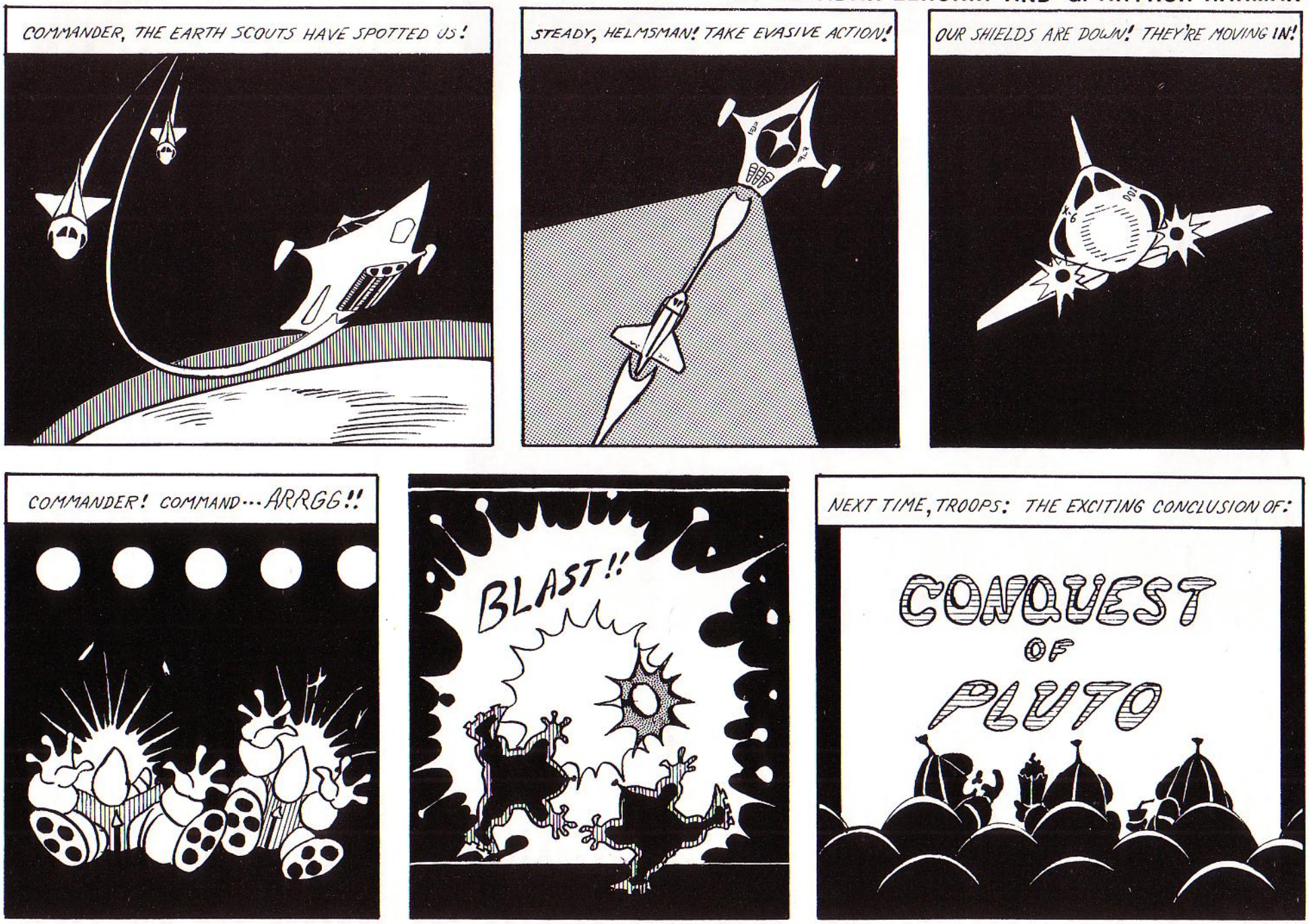
He sat down on the bed. I could see that he couldn't contain himself any longer.

"See, I got this letter from the guy in Cleveland, The 'Russian' player. He's given up: he said he'd really enjoyed the game, but he'd been trying to keep track of it in his room at college and what with graduation coming on he couldn't keep his set-up. Says he's had it with maps and counters, and that he wishes he could keep track of the game by computer the way I do."

# ABSOLUTE ZERO

BY ELLADAN ELROHIR AND G. ARTHUR RAHMAN





# HOT STUFF!

*by*
JERRY D. BELL

Come all ye bold Sanhogs
And venture yer necks,
Come follow the bullies that fly for Wolf Beck.
Drink down the whiskey
And away from the rail,
Come follow the sergeant to the Red Grail.
And the times are hard and the times are rough,
Come follow Wolf Beck, we'll give them hot stuff!

The gallowglass road
Is a rough one to hoe
It's out in the dark the sanhogs will go.
The water is hard
And the whiskey's weak,
The first sergeants knock you into next week.
And cooped up in transit until yer skin rusts
Howling for Wolf, to give Him hot stuff!

But you pick up a trade
And you pick up some pay
Come landfall the corporals will show you the way.
Down Conklin Street stroll
And the Shelas all coo —
Ain't it a wonder what a blue shirt will do?
Now being a trooper, well it ain't so rough
Hurrah for Wolf and give us hot stuff!

The contracts are here
And now we will go,
Back to the Dark where the dead winds blow.
Kiss off the bints
And kill the jug
The last files are loading, climb in the tug.
Ten hours aboard afore we raise dust
Wolf leads there my boys, to give them hot stuff!

The Sappers are here
And the bold engineers
Dropping to earn their whiskeys and beers.
Dust off yer rifles
And pick up yer guns,
We'll load to the tune of Red Double Sun
Follow yer sergeants, give them no guff
Wolf's down there, my boys, catching hot stuff!

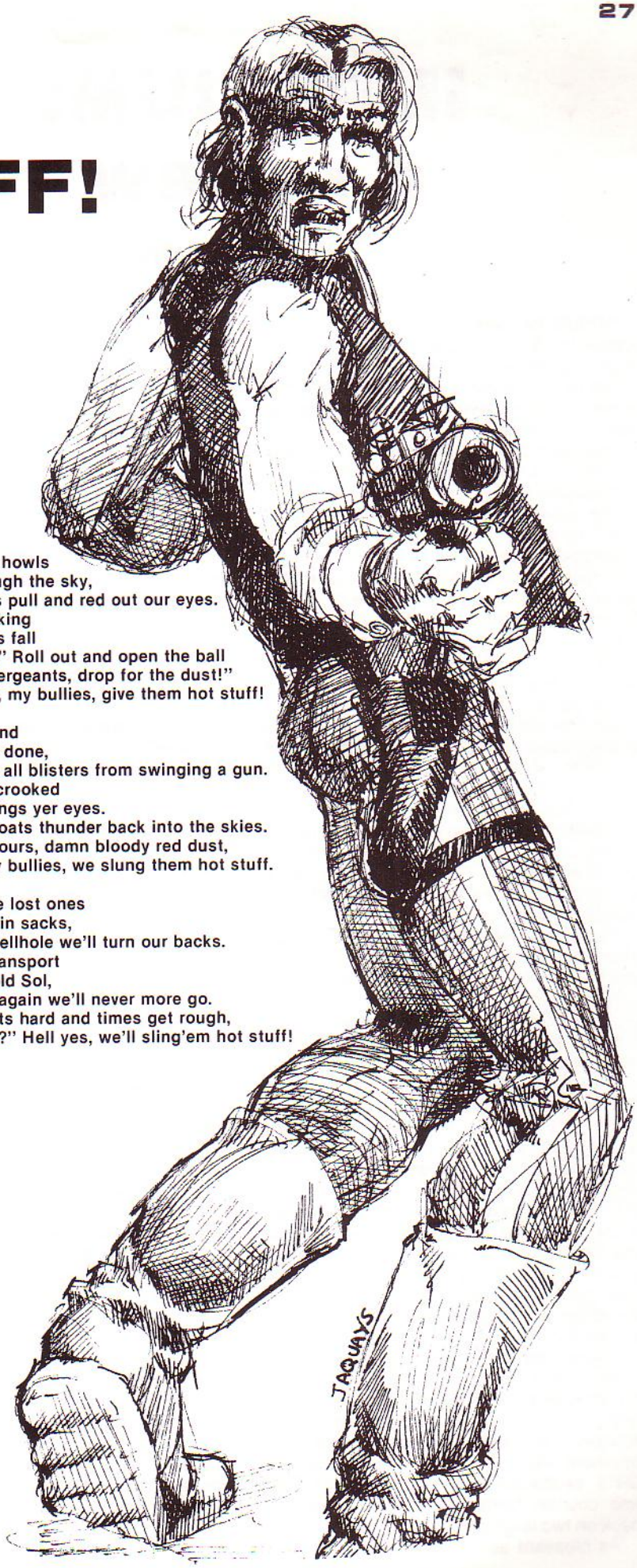
The rangers drop free
To point out the way,
Hitting black mud at Line'o'day.
The masers are placed,
The skip boats away
It's time for the sanhogs to go earn their pay.
And ye that love fighting, will soon have enough.
Wolf leads us, my boys, we'll sling 'em hot stuff.

Strap well yer harness
Charge well yer guns
That LZ is hot and not from the suns.
The rangers are calling
Hellzapoppin' below
To the sound of the cannon the sanhogs will go.
And ye that loves fighting will soon have enough
Wolf needs us, his bullies, to give them hot stuff!

The skip boat howls
We drop through the sky,
The delta-vees pull and red out our eyes.
The LZ is cooking
And the ramps fall
"We're down!" Roll out and open the ball
"Follow yer Sergeants, drop for the dust!"
Wolf leads us, my bullies, give them hot stuff!

At the day's end
The fighting's done,
Yer hands are all blisters from swinging a gun.
The dead lay crooked
And sweat stings yer eyes.
The Dustoff boats thunder back into the skies.
The ground's ours, damn bloody red dust,
We won it, my bullies, we slung them hot stuff.

So pick up the lost ones
and the tarlupin sacks,
And on this Hellhole we'll turn our backs.
Back to the transport
And back to old Sol,
And trooping again we'll never more go.
But if time gets hard and times get rough,
"Wolf lead us?" Hell yes, we'll sling'em hot stuff!



# IMPERIUM: a review

*by*
TONY WATSON

**IMPERIUM** was the last SF game to appear in 1977, but time means little in this case; it is probably the best.

Game Designer's Workshop/Conflict Game Company have come up with a design which combines strategy and tactical combat with political and economic considerations in a game that is both challenging and flavorful to play.

The basic situation is a bit different than most strategic space games. A young, aggressive confederation of star systems in infringing on the domains of an older, established interstellar empire. The twist, as the above excerpt from the introduction belies, is that it is Terra that has turned her thoughts to aggrandizement, and an alien empire that seeks to resist her.

The game's design does not fail its unique intent. The two powers are *not* mirror images of each other, and do not start the game in the same relative positions as in many other games of this type. The ships available to each, while similar, are not identical, having different tactical powers. The Imperial player labors under a less lucrative economic system than does the Terran, as well as being answerable and restricted by an off map galactic emperor.

Physically, **IMPERIUM** is a first class effort, perhaps intended for large scale retail sales. This would make sense, in light of the continuing popularity of **STAR WARS**; in fact, the cover art, excellently done by Steve Fabian, features a ship that is strongly reminiscent of an Imperial Star Destroyer.

The game comes boxed with six cardboard trays lining the bottom. The map is 19" x 25" and mounted. (The map in my copy was slightly warped; I can't say if this is characteristic of all the games or not.) It is done in four colors, and is very eye appealing. The hex field is in an appropriate inky black. Stars are red, yellow or white, while the jump routes connecting them are in a shade of green that provides a brilliant contrast to the black playing area. Star names are done in red for secondary and tertiary systems, and white for primary systems.

Player aids along the map side include tracks indicating the turn and arrival of reinforcements and replacements, a map key, and a resource track to account for resources spent and accumulated. Most other pertinent information, such as the various CRTs, production cost chart, ship ID code and counter formats are printed back to back on two large cards, one for each player.

As pleasant as the components are, the real fun is in the play of the game.

Movement is hyperspatial in nature, and theoretically unlimited when moving on jump routes. In practice, movement is limited by the presence of enemy ships. The jump routes connecting stars are the focal point of the game. All stars, save two (the interstellar boonies as it were), are connected to one or more other stars, forming a sort of hyperspatial net. Certain stars can be very important because of their location and links to other systems. At the onset of the game, the two players can only get to one another along two narrow routes, thus making the control of stars along these paths of prime importance.

Each player has two movement phases in his own turn, bracketing the opposing player's reaction movement. During his movement phases, a player may move along connected stars as far as he wishes until he comes to a star occupied by enemy ships, where he must halt and fight. During reaction movement, a player may move any given stack (one only per reaction phase) up to three stars.

A third, much slower alternative movement which players may undertake is sublight movement. This is a snail's pace of one hex per turn (not phase). Needless to say, sublight movement is rarely used.

Ships may not move through systems occupied by opposing forces; they must halt and give combat.

**IMPERIUM** is a strategic game, but its interesting and excellent combat system gives battles strong tactical overtones. Each vessel is rated for three battle attributes: beams, missles, and shields. Ship design is one of the aspects of the game that illustrates the differences between the two sides. Within a given class rating (destroyer, light crusier, dreadnought, etc), Terran ships are usually rated higher for beams and lower for missiles than their Imperial counterparts. Shield power is usually about even, though in some cases, the Terran is slightly favored.

The importance of these differences becomes apparent when one examines the game's combat system. Once battle is joined, combat rounds are fought in succession until one side is eliminated or breaks off. At the beginning of each round, the range is determined, being either short range (the only range that beams can be used), or long (the optimum range for missiles). Each player throws a die (the player with the fewest ships present may add one), and the high man determines the range for that round. The first round is always fought at long range, often a significant advantage for the Imperial player. Once range is selected, fire is allocated. The defender puts forth one ship, the attacker then puts forth one to fight it; this process continues until all ships are allocated. Any extra, unmatched ships may be used to double up on the enemy or elect to stay screened for that round, unaffected by combat. The ship fire allocation part of the round is very important, as the choices of a good player will vary with the range and type of opposition.

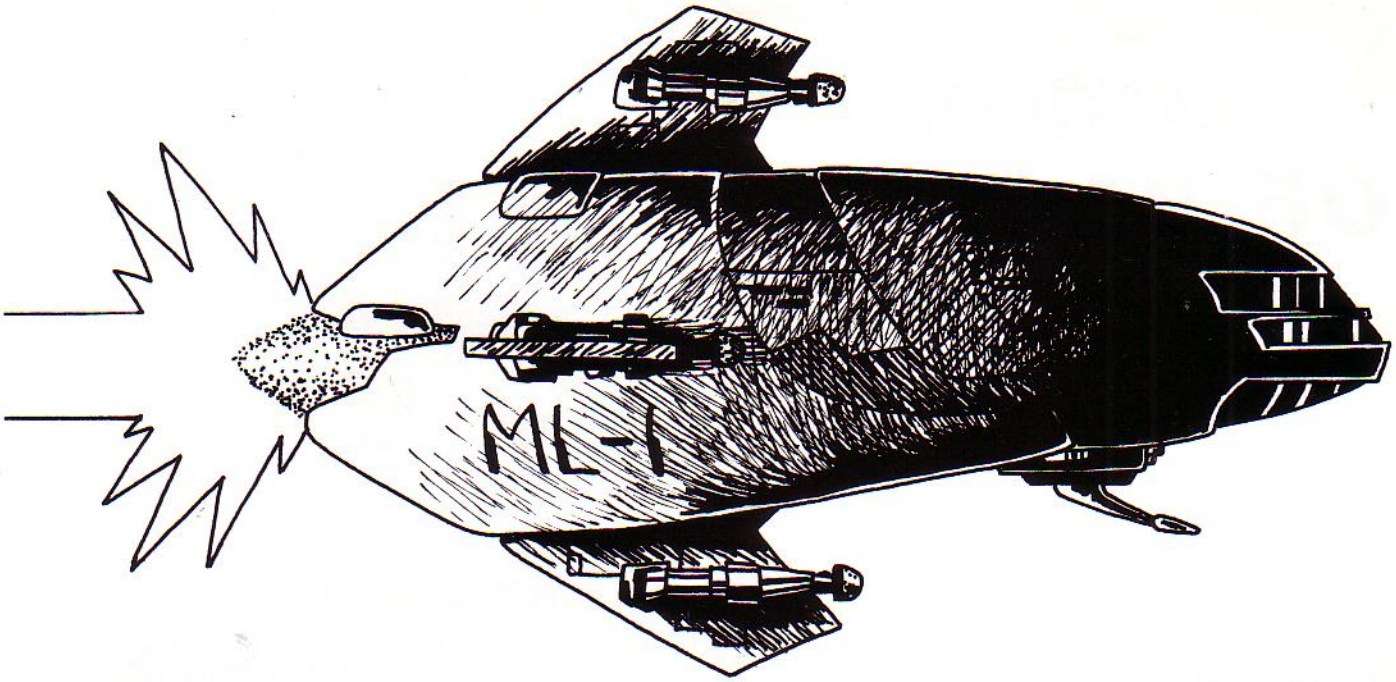
Two CRTs are used, one for missiles and one for beams. To resolve a given combat, players cross index the attacker's appropriate factor with the defender's shield value to yield a number which must be equalled or exceeded on the throw of one die. The two charts are different, the beam CRT being the more bloody and thus favoring the Terran if he can bring the Imperials to close combat. All regular attacks are handled simultaneously, with both ships firing before any destroyed ships are removed.

Three special combat options are available. Double missile fire allows a ship to double its missile factor for one round, after which it may no longer use missiles in that combat. Ships may also fire missiles at half strength at close range, an option useful for the Imperial player. Suicide attacks are allowed at close range, using beams; the suicider may add one to the die, but must survive the defender's fire before rolling for his own attack.

Ships that feel a combat is going against them may break off. They may not fire in the break off combat round and surviving ships may escape to adjacent friendly or empty stars.

After ship to ship combat is resolved, the victor may choose to assault any enemy planets around the star. Space craft may bombard markers on the planet, counting missile factor totals and rolling on a special bombardment chart. Surviving planetary defense units, outpost or world markers may fire back, using their own CRT. These units may fire at each bombarding ship, so assaulting a well defended planet can be expensive. After bombardment, troops may be landed. Regular troops are landed via transport ships that must undergo planetary fire before landing. The more elite jump troops can be launched from ships in space, and stand a better chance of landing in one piece, All planetary markers are kept in surface holding boxes next to the star in question, thus eliminating stacking problems between nonmobile units and ships. Once landed, troops may engage in planetary combat against enemy troops, outposts, defense units or world markers. As one would expect, troops are the most powerful units for surface combat. Combat is conducted in a manner quite similar to ship combat, except that units roll on a different CRT that heavily favors the stronger unit.

**IMPERIUM** has a strong economic base, determined by planetary holdings and, for the Imperial player, a budget. Troops, planetary defenses, outposts, and ships must all




be paid for. In addition, ships must be maintained if a player wishes to retain his fleet in fighting trim.

Each turn, at the beginning of his movement phase, a player determines his resources. The Terran player receives eight RUs per world held, and one per outpost (this can be lowered if these stars are cut off from others). The Imperial player receives one RU per world or outpost, plus his budget, which begins at ten. The importance of worlds is apparent, especially to the Terran. Only a few planets are capable of supporting worlds (primary systems), and converting outposts to worlds is not easy. Worlds also have increased planetary defense over outposts. Outposts can be had by simply paying their cost and moving them (via transport ship), to an unoccupied or neutralized enemy planet. Unless the Imperial player can gain budget increases, the Terran will soon have more RUs due to higher rates for worlds, and better opportunities for colonization.

RUs are spent on building ships; players consult the cost chart, pay the price and wait. Purchased ships do not appear until the next turn. Capital ships have a two turn wait. The many types of ships available insure players can usually get a ship with the attributes they need, provided they can pay the price. Troops and planetary defenses may also be purchased.

Once ships are constructed, maintaining them becomes important. Maintenance comes into play only at the beginning of the game turn. There are two methods; civilized maintenance (which takes place only at friendly worlds), and frontier maintenance (which comes into play if the ship is anywhere else). Each ship has a maintenance number from one to six. This is the cost, per turn, which must be paid for that ship for civilized maintenance (in RUs). Building and maintaining a large fleet can become expensive. The frontier method is a bit different; instead of paying the listed number, the owner rolls a die. If the number rolled equals or exceeds the maintenance figure the ship is fine; if not, it is considered disrupted. Disruption only affects combat, causing the owner to subtract one when firing, and allowing the opposition to add one when attacking. It should be noted that a number of ships have maintenance numbers of one, and thus are always undisrupted.

One of the most interesting features of the game is the wealth of rules concerning the Imperial player's relationship to the Empire. The Imperial player's position in the game is one of a regional governor, and his dependence on the Imperium and the Emperor is manyfold. The obvious one is the Imperial budget of ten RUs per turn. The Imperium also replaces ships lost at the rate of one per turn, thus allowing the Imperial player to spend a little less on replacing losses, and more on buying new ships.

However, the Emperor's rule is an iron one; at the beginning of the game, the Imperial player is forbidden to build ships of the heavy crusier class or higher. This can be crucial if the Terran player gets a few lumbering battleships out. Permission to build higher class ships, budget increases or RU grants can be obtained by rolling on the Appeals to the Emperor charts. There are two: Increased Forces and Increased Finances. The charts use two dice, with rolls of seven or higher being positive and four or lower being negative (the Emperor refuses to hear any more appeals for the balance of the game). Each roll requires the expenditure of one Glory Point (explained later).

In addition to these charts, the Imperial player must roll on the Imperial Intervention table at the beginning of each turn. Events run from no effect to depression and booms to reinforcements and mandated offensives (with an Imperial outlay of RUs or ships). There is even an Imperial succession, with the possibility of an off map civil war in which the Imperial player can participate in hopes of future gain. The entire body of rules concerning the Imperium add considerable flavor to that position, as well as adding some random influence on the game.

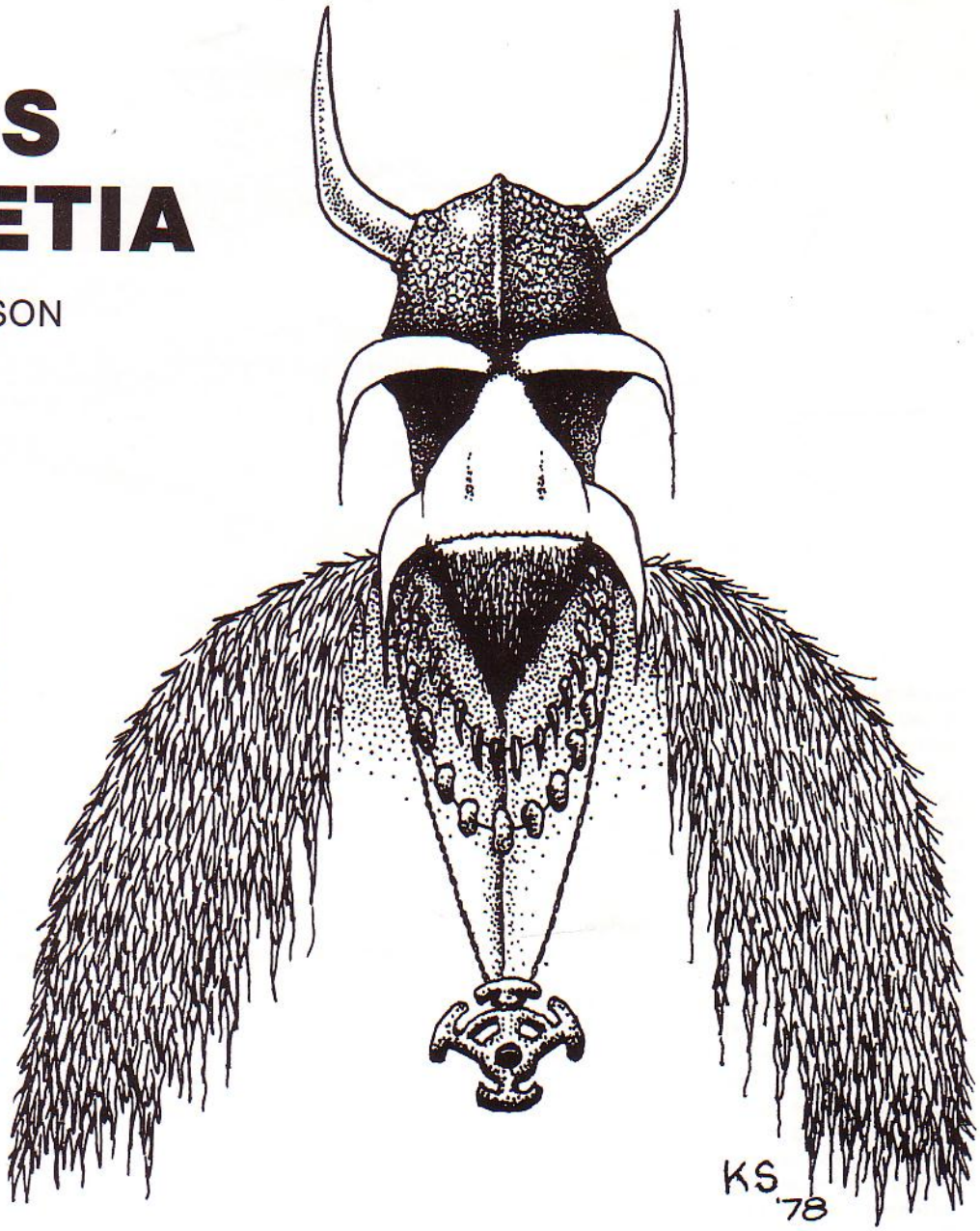
**IMPERIUM** is both a game that can be played in one night, and a campaign game. Each game represents one war. Wars are won by points with players gaining points by capturing enemy outpost or worlds. Points gained and lost are kept track of on the Imperial player Glory Point track. When this index reaches a certain number (varying with game turn), the war is over. An interwar period follows in which players determine the length of the war, exchange untenable bases in enemy tertitory, colonize where able, and build new forces for the *next* war. In addition, units left over from the last war may be lost due to interwar attrition. After all these functions, the winner of the previous war sets up, then the loser, and the next war begins, with the loser of the last making the first move (no doubt out to settle grievances!) The entire campaign is won when one player controls all the stars on the map. Playing an entire campaign could take a while, though individual wars are fairly short (each turn represents two years), and usually do not last more than eight or nine turns. Such a game could be played in two and a half to three hours.

**IMPERIUM** brings together many common themes of science fiction, and ties them to an excellent and intriguing game system which places both players in a unique situation with unique abilities to respond to that situation. Its ease of play makes it an enjoyable game. I predict it will be a classic.

**IMPERIUM**, designed by Marc W. Miller is available for $11.98 from Conflict Game Company, 201 Broadway, Normal, Illinois 61761.

# LORDS OF VALETIA

*by*
BRIAN ESTERSON




This fantasy role playing correspondence game was designed by Andrew Baird for his company, Ans Varkus. Flyers and a couple of ads in S&T appeared about a year and a half ago, but just as the game was getting underway, Ans Varkus had some sort of financial crisis and went under. The game was picked up by Designs Operations, Inc. and, after six months, seems to have settled down and started running smoothly.

Basically, the game follows the usual FRP pattern of a character being given different levels of attributes and starting at the bottom of a graded ladder. As he gains experience he rises up the ladder until (hopefully), the top rung is reached. A year's subscription to LORDS OF VALETIA gets you twelve monthly moves, plus any number of submoves (Encounters). These are needed to resolve any combat situations that come up. There is very little interaction between characters at the lower levels, and all combat is with game generated characters, not your fellow players.

The action takes place on a four island archipelago; Tar Pellith, Tar Ras, Tar At and Tar Tear. A three page history is given and, to condense it severely, goes like this: The islands contained four Folk: Men, Hobbits, Dwarves and Elves. Also, there were lesser creatures and pirates under Lord Korloth of Tar Tser to the east. Perceiving Korloth's growing evil power, the two other Lords, Merren and Darathon, formed an alliance to destroy him. Growing fearful, Merren launched his attack on Korloth before linking with Darathon and was destroyed at sea. Upon hearing the news, Darathon came up with a plan to gain the time needed to marshal his forces. He formed the Peregrinators of Valetia, and comprised it of the best and bravest sons and daughters of the land. Given rings of limited power and medallions entitling them to needed supplies, the Peregrinators were sent to harass the enemy and upset Korloth's war plans. When he was finally ready, Darathon attacked and destroyed Korloth's hosts. In the battle, though, Korloth and one of his lieutenants escaped. Mindful of this danger, Darathon did not disband the Peregrinators.

When you generate a character, you pick which of the four Folk you desire, and whether you wish to join the Company of Warriors (open to all) or the Ring of Sages (Men and Elves only). The Company commands legions and has a chance to become Lord of the Empire, but is denied knowledge of magic. The Ring, on the other hand, is privy to the secrets of the mind, but foregoes the chance to lead. There are ten levels in both classes; the top three of which are competed for. You are given a detailed map of the island you are on. Various terrain features are linked by numbered segments, representing roads. If you are not doing one of several activities in a city, you can travel one segment in a month. Straight travel gets you a short description of the countryside and, probably, no incidents. Exploration gets you a more detailed description, and greatly increases the chances of meeting someone (or thing) unpleasant. If this happens, you are given an Encounter submove which is to be settled before the next monthly move. It consists of a tactical map detailing the situation. You tell, verbally, what your tactics are and the gamemaster cranks them through his probability tables. None of this machinery is visible, though, only the results are given. Points are gained if you are successful, the amount depending on the ferocity of the creature fought. If you are unsuccessful, the ring of power will save you twice. The third time, a new level-one character must be generated. Points are also garnered for completion of Quests, which are announced in a newsletter enclosed with each move.

In all, the game shows thought and imagination. The above history does not do the original justice. Very little information, aside from the rules, is given at first. You learn about the land and the creatures in it as you explore. Cost of a one year subscription is $19.50 from: RB&B Design Operations, Inc., 354A South Locust Street, Valparaiso, Indiana, 46383.

# LETTERS

In regard to my article in issue 14 of **THE SPACE GAMER**: *Eldon Tannish & the War of the Warp*; there are two errors that I have spotted. In the two player version III A 2 Eldon's reinforcement-resupply points should be 10BP. This is what makes the game unsymmetrical — Eldon starts with more, but gets fewer replacements. The other error was mine. In the solitaire version II A, the computer should receive as starting forces: S4, S5, S8, and S12 (not S13, as there is no S13 listed on the ship characteristics chart).

Dana Holm
Council Bluffs, IA

Both **CHITIN: I** and **MELEE** use the term *megahex* to refer to a collection of little hexes grouped into one big hex. Speaking literally, *megahex* means "a million hexes", but the largest megahex I have ever seen contains only nineteen. I suggest that a more appropriate term would be *macrohex*, which means "large hex".

As it stands, **MELEE** is incomplete. It is lacking some balanced scenerios for people without the time or ability to develop their own. Example: just how big a giant do you need to make a fair fight against three warriors? How about an article by some experienced **MELEE** players describing some good scenarios?

Solitaire rules are useful, not only when opponents are hard to find, but also for learning how to play games. I would like to see some good solitaire rules for **STELLAR CONQUEST**. I recently played my first game of **SC**. I think some solitaire play beforehand would have helped me avoid thoroughly botching that six-hour session.

How about having Winchell Chung (or one of your other fine artists) design a new counter set for **STELLAR CONQUEST**, along the lines of your newer games? You could sell the new counters to people who already have a copy of **SC**. If **SC** were as interesting to look at as it is to play, I think it would be easier to attract players.

Scott D. Johnson
Ithaca, NY

Although I agree with much of what was said in Neil Shapiro's review of **WHITE BEAR AND RED MOON** he neglects to mention one thing that leaves me slightly disturbed. The extent to which the games are unfinished (I am also referring to the **NOMAD GODS**, the second game in the Dragon Pass series.)

Some may say that this incompleteness adds mystique and a certain charm to the game rather than detracts from it. It is true that when I bought **WHITE BEAR AND RED MOON** I excused the unexplained features on the grounds that The Chaosium would explain these things as they published more games in the Dragon Pass series.

Then I bought **NOMAD GODS** and there was even more unexplained data. Sixteen counters are unexplained in addition to three terrain features. In a heading called "Apologia & Explanatia" these things are explained away as "insignificant at worst, curious and exotic at their best."

I disagree and I resent having spent ten dollars for a game only to find that I must subscribe to an "irregularly" published magazine to learn how to utilize all the components of this game. I regard this as a shoddy maneuver of The Chaosium to get more money into their organization.

Tom Jensen
Minneapolis, MN

In the review of **ALPHA OMEGA**, I incorrectly stated that the title bears no relation to the rest of the game. In fact, the Mason Field Space Drive used in the game is generated by the interaction of Alpha and Omega subparticles. Hence, the name. This is explained in a marvelous half-page of pseudo-scientific doubletalk which is utterly meaningless in terms of 20th century physics. They even manage to imply that the hexagonal grid is a representation of reality, due to the asymmetric nature of the field generated by the Xanthe crystals. More game designers should devise such rationalizations for game mechanics; it makes the whole field so much more believable.

Roger Cooper's letter spurred me to research. I have now found spectral classification data for the remaining stars on the **STARFORCE** map (though *some* of the identifications are somewhat tentative). These are derived from the *Royal Observatory Annals #5: Catalogue of Stars within twenty-five parsecs of the Sun,* by Sir Richard Woolley, Elizabeth A. Epps, Margaret J. Penston, and Susan B. Pocock, Royal Greenwich Observatory, 1970. A copy of this is available at the University of Manitoba Science Library. This publication contains most of the stars mentioned in W. Gliese's *Catalogue of Nearby Stars*, with some differences. The reason some of my identifications remain uncertain (followed by ?) is that the parallax method of distance determination has some flaws, positioning on the **STARFORCE** map is necessarily imprecise, and every star catalog lists different names/code numbers for most stars. (The Catalogue itself lists 7 alternate catalog references for each star, one column of "finding chart" codes, and a potpourri heading of "other catalogues.") The stars I've marked as imprecise are not listed under the same names as on the game map, and are at different distances according to parallax. They are, however, in the same direction;

p(rho)Eridani KO/KO
Ross 47 M4
BD 45 (0913/16) G2 ?
Luyten 674-15 M
Innes' Star KO ?
Ross 986 M5
Wolf 294 M4
Luyten 97-12 wdF
CD-20 K5/M2
Wolf 562 M5
CD-40 M4
Luyten 68-28 KO
CD-26 K5
BD 45 (1734/14) M4/M3
UC 48 M
CD-21 (1938/-7) F5 ?
Luyten 347-14 M7
BD 4 M3/M5
Lalande 46650 M2
CD-45 MO
CD-21 (2002/-7) M1
BD 53 MO/MO
CD-21 (3325/-5) M2/M4
Lalande 21258 M2/M5

The name problem also caused Mr. Cooper's problem with Omicron² Eridani. This is 40 Eridani, the star system of *Star Trek's* Vulcan homeworld. It is found at R.A. 4h14', Dec. -7 41'. It has a parallax of .205", and is a tertiary system on the **STARFORCE** map at 2707/-2. Some of Mr. Cooper's spectral classes differ from the ones I gave because the classes actually differ very little. They overlap somewhat, and reclassification can often change a star from one group to another.

Bryan van Blaricon brought up an interesting point: **STELLAR CONQUEST** cannot be transferred *directly* onto the **STARFORCE** map. I presumed that players would use the real distance scale, so that 1 **SF** hex was 8 times as wide as a **SC** hex. Then I tried to play it that way: before players have established a few colonies, they have already reached maximum technology, if they had a homeworld to start. As well, the communication distance is only 1 hex. Ergo, you *have* to use a larger scale. Extend the communication range to 10 light-years. Then use 1 turn equal to 10 years. Thus, a movement allowance of 2 means .2 x the speed of light. At maximum technology, speed is .8 light. This allows ships to load, unload, etc. without exceeding the speed of light in between stars. Note that this lengthens the time between production years. The growth rate on a TR world is now 20% in 40 years, or ½% per year (actually less, but I'm too lazy to do the exponential calculation). This is nearly ZPG, which is reasonable for a labor force on a highly developed planet. Technological development occurs much more slowly, which is also reasonable.

Norman S. Howe
Winnipeg, Canada

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